SADHANAS FROM

ADHYATMA RAMAYANAM



SWAMI SHANTANANDA

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The yellow globe represents the Earth. The small hairy-like projections on its periphery represent the flames of suffering and unhappiness burning the humanity. The yellow colour denotes the auspiciousness brought by the manifestation of the Supreme Lord as Rama represented by his sandals. The straps are straps of the infinite compassion binding the Lord to the suffering Earth.

The credit for the donation of this beautiful imaginative design goes to Ms. Arpana Caur, an internationally applauded Artist of Delhi. Thank you very much Arpana Ji!

SADHANAS FROM
Adhyatma Ramayanam

Swami Shantananda

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Sadhanas from Adhyatma Ramayanam - a quintessence of Sadhanas culled out from Adhyatma Ramayanam by **Sri Swami Shantananda.**

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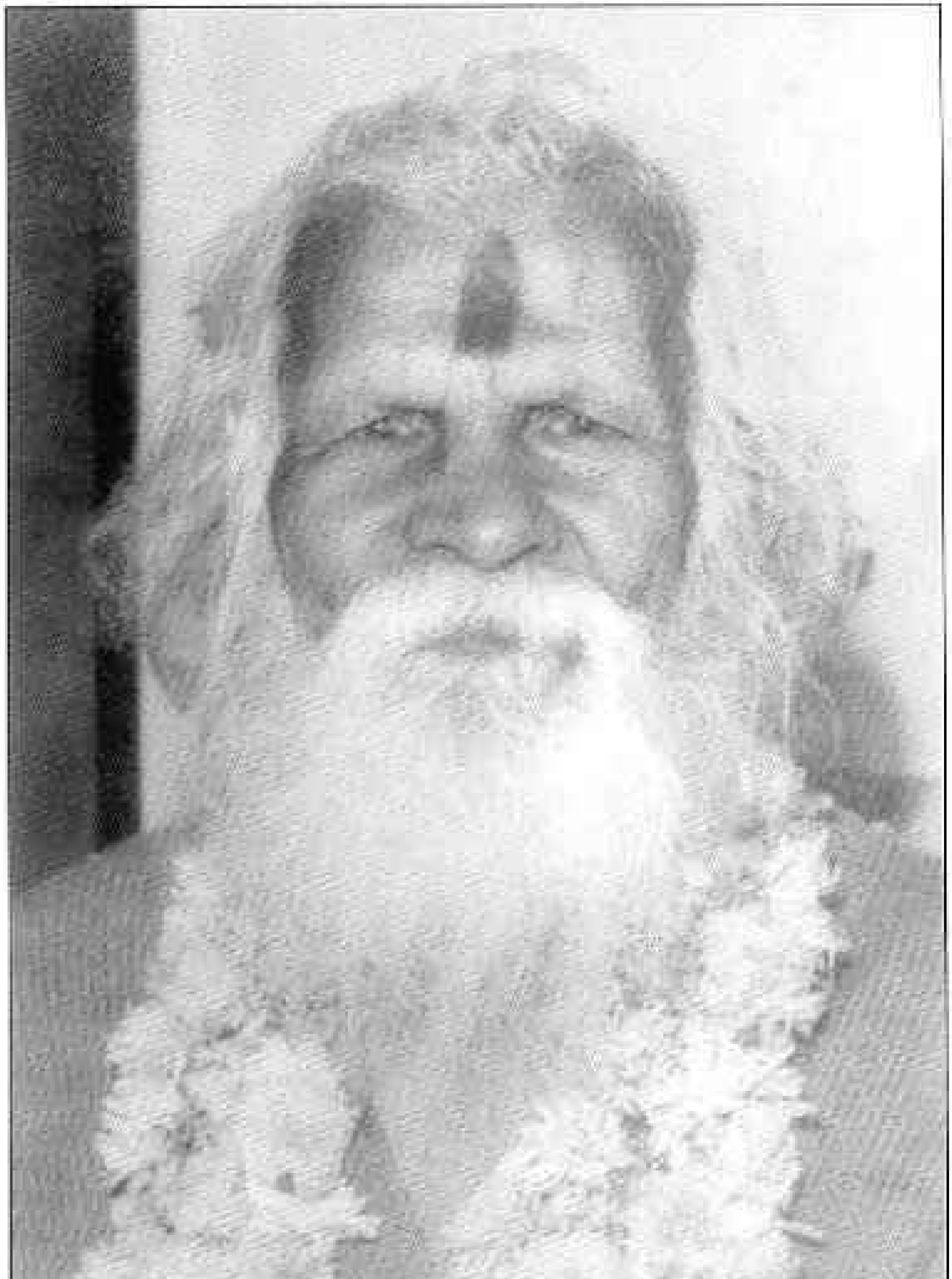
SAMARPAN

This book is dedicated with veneration
to the Lotus Feet of my revered Guru

Swami Purushottamanandaji
of Vasishtha Guha, U.P., Himalayas,

but for whose infinite Compassion
I would not have been able to formulate
my thoughts on Srimad Bhāgavatam
and put them down
in this book,
and
to the thousands of Spiritual
Sādhākas all over the world.

- Swami Shantananda



H.H. Srimad Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj

Preface

'Adhyatma Ramayanam,' authored by Vyasa, as the name denotes, is replete with spiritual teachings from beginning to end. Ramayana is one story which has never ceased to interest a Sadhaka and whose fascination never palls even if one reads it or hears it several times. Valmiki describes Ramayana as a great story of Sita (SITĀYĀS CHARITAM MAHAT). The secret of it is revealed in 'Rama Hrudayam' in the very first canto of Adhyatma Ramayanam that as Sita was the Primordial Nature (PRAKRITI) all the exploits of Rama were got done by her only. Ramayana means the house where Rama, who is verily the Para Brahman, dwells. Truly when one reads or hears this text, one can see Rama as one's own very Self in every stanza.

While on the one hand it is a story with a lot of teachings, the very story has a deep esoteric significance. As Adi Sankaracharya[1] has told, Rama, Sita etc., are all symbolic. Every man who comes to the forest of this world loses his peace of mind. He has to cross over the mighty ocean of delusion and destroy the Vasanas of kama (lust) and krodha (anger) etc., who are the very demons. Ravana with his ten heads represented the ten senses (INDRIYAS). Rama brings back the Peace of mind (Sita) after annihilating

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1. तीर्त्वा मोहार्णवं हत्वा कामादिराक्षसान्।
शान्तिसीतासमायुक्तो आत्मारामो विराजते ॥ (Atma Bodha)

the vasanas and enjoys with Sita, becoming Atma Rama, the Rama who revels in his own Self. This is the real Ramayana of every man.

While on the one hand this Adhyatma Ramayanam speaks of the truths of the hightest Vedanta, side by side it stresses on the worship of a personal God with form (Sakara and Saguna) and attributes and on the glory of taking the name of God. In Uttarakanda, the hearing of the mahavakyas (great statements of dictum) of Vedanta has been mentioned as a sadhana in the same breath as reciting the name of the Lord (VII -7th canto – 71). Even though Rama explains both Bhakti yoga and Jnana yoga to his mother, Kausalya, he advises her to follow Bhakti yoga (Uttarakanda – 7-81). In Aranyakanda, Rama's delineation of the nine types of Bhakti (aids to Bhakti) to Sabari is something unique and Goswami Tulsi Das has also incorporated it in his Ramacharit Manas (Ramayana in Hindi) verbatim.

Again and again, Adhyatma Ramayanam lays maximum emphasis on the cultivation of the company of holy men and saints (Satsanga) as the foremost aid from which only all Sadhana, whether through Jnana yoga or Bhakti yoga etc., can start.

In this book, an effort has been made to emphasise the spiritual Truths and specific Sadhanas as given in Adhyatma Ramayanam. As it is stated that reading the entire Ramayana itself will purify the mind and ultimately lead one to Moksha, the entire story has also to be summarised as a main Sadhana in itself.

The original Adhyatma Ramayanam has also got excellent literary beauty. Vyasa has just incorporated in this Ramayana a number of slokas (stanzas) or part of them just by lifting them from his Srimad Bhagavatam.

The total number of Ramayanas written by various authors run to a hundred crore, as per Tulsi Das. There is an amusing incident in Adhyatma Ramayanam. When Rama was dissuading Sita from accompanying him, she tells him "I have heard a number of Ramayanas read by pundits. Please tell me whether Rama had gone to the forest unaccompanied by Sita in any one of them?"[2]

Adhyatma Ramayanam specifically reveals that Ravana was fully aware from the beginning that Rama was the Supreme Lord and Sita was Goddess Lakshmi herself. As he had heard from Sanatkumara that any demon who is killed by Lord Hari gets Moksha, he had decided from the beginning to die in the hands of the Lord in a battle. It is said that when Ravana brought and installed Sita in Ashok Vanam, he treated her like his own mother.[3]

The three most important spiritual discourses contained in Adhyatma Ramayanam are :–

1. Rama Hrudayam – Instructions to Hanuman by Sita and Rama in Chapter I of BALA KANDA

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2. रामायणानि बहुशः श्रुतानि बहुभिर्द्विजैः ॥ II - 4 - 77
   सीतां विना वनं रमो गतः किं कुत्रचिद्वद ॥ II - 4 - 78

3. i) राक्षसीभिः परिवृतां मातृबुद्ध्यान्वपालयत्॥ III - 7 - 65
   ii) मातृवत्पालयामास त्वत्तः कांक्षन्वधं स्वकम्॥ VII - 4 - 11

2. Rama Gita (brief) – Instructions to Lakshmana by Rama in Chapter IV of Aranya Kanda

3. Rama Gita (detailed) – Instructions to Lakshmana by Rama in Chapter V of Uttarakanda.

These can be considered as the quintessence of Upanishadic knowledge. It is told that the story of Ramayana will be current among people (atleast in India) till the Himalayas and Vindhya mountains continue to remain and till all the rivers of India get dry.[4]

A stage has come in India that the modern students are not aware of this heritage and have no knowledge of their epics. There is a funny story in this connection :

In a High School, a visiting Inspector of schools suddenly entered into a class and found that Ramayana was being taught in that period. He asked one of the boys "Who broke the bow of Lord Siva?" The boy got up in all agitation and with his lips trembling answered – "Sir, I assure you Sir, I never went near that bow and I did not break it Sir, please believe me." The Inspector got amused at this unexpected reply and turning towards the teacher asked him – "What is all this?" The teacher also very respectfully replied "Respected Sir, nowadays all these boys

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4. यावत्स्रवन्ति सरितः यावद् विन्ध्यहिमालयौ ।
तावद्रामायणकथा लोकेषु प्रचलिष्यति ॥

do some mischief like breaking some item and then swear that they never did it. Lying is so common with these boys. I shall, however, warn this boy not to do it in future." The Inspector was aghast at this reply. He went to the principal and narrated this event. The principal told him – "The teacher has already informed me of this unfortunate incident. I have contacted the boy's parents who are quite affluent and they have agreed to give us a letter of apology asking for forgiveness and to reimburse the cost of damages caused by the breaking. So please do not worry, Sir. We have already initiated necessary action. The Inspector tore his own hair in despair.

While I was just sitting in my room in an Ashram in Gujarat on 17-1-2007 an inner voice whispered to me – "You started with Srimad Bhagavatam and wrote a book on Bhagavad Gita too (part of Mahabharata). Why don't you write on Adhyatma Ramayanam?" This started me on writing this book.

One Surendra Bhai of Baroda gave me a copy of Adhyatma Ramayana with a discourse on it in Hindi by Sri Swami Akhandananda Saraswati Maharaj of Brindavan the very next day (18-1-2007) when I went to meet him. The author is very grateful to late Sri Swami Akhandanandaji Maharaj of Brindavan whose lucid commentary was of great help.

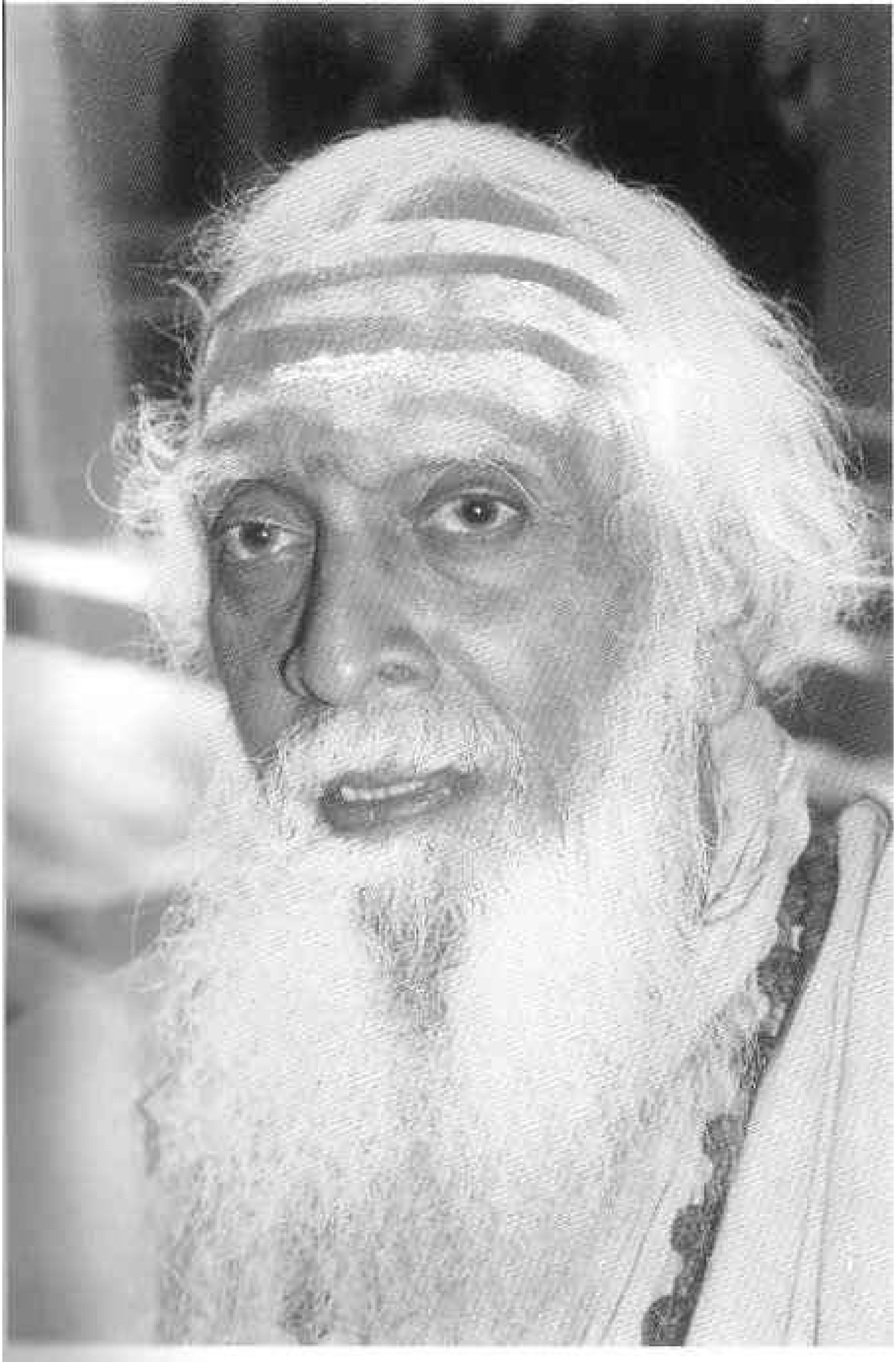
A very thoughtful and unique cover has been designed by the Internationally reputed artist Ms. Arpana Caur. May the Divine Mother Bless her with good health and prosperity.

Excellent printing with love has become synonymous with Omkar Offset Printers. As in the past, Sri P.S.Venkatesh Babu and his associates (esp., Sri B. Nagendra) in M/S Omkar Offset Printers have printed this book also in a very beautiful way. May they continue to prosper in all walks of life.

May Lord Ramachandra's Grace and Blessings be on all the readers and myself too.

LOVE and HARI OM

Malsar *Swami Shantananda*
6-2-2007



Sri Swami Shantananda Puri

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II OM SRI RAJARAJESVARYAI NAMAHA II

SADHANAS FROM ADHYATMA RAMAYANAM

Part-I

BALA KĀNDA

Adhyatma Ramayanam was authored by Vyasa, the composer of Mahabharata while the first Ramayana (Adi Kaavyam) was composed by Valmiki Rishi. 'Adhyatma' means that which relates to the Lord, the indweller in our hearts. Adhyatma Ramayanam means the story of the Supreme Lord, who incarnated (avatar) as Rama, the Sat-Chidananda. This book stresses on the spiritual aspects as to how Rama was but the Supreme Reality and the ways to liberation (God-realisation) through knowledge (Jnana) supported by Bhakti (love and devotion) and Karma.

The two most prominent episodes of spiritual importance in this book are (1) RAMA HRUDAYAM and (2) RAMA GITA and the entire book is in the form of conversation between Lord

SIVA and PARVATI. The two aforesaid episodes can be considered as constituting the essence of all Upanishads.

RAMA HRUDAYAM

The very first Chapter of this Ramayanam starts with 'Rama Hrudayam', which deals with the real form (swaroopa) of Sri Rama.

Once Parvati asked Lord Siva – "Some consider Sri Rama as the ultimate Reality[1], the Supreme Lord bereft of Maya. If he was the Supreme Lord, how could it be that he wept like a common man at the separation from Sita, his consort? If he had the knowledge (the Supreme Knowledge), why had Vasishtha to instruct him (in YOGA VASISHTHA)? If he was an ordinary ignorant man why should people worship him? Please also tell me the eternal Truth relating to the Supreme Lord and explain what is knowledge, experiential knowledge (Vijnana), Vairagya (dispassion) and Bhakti (devotion)".

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1. वदन्ति रामं परमेकमाद्यं निरस्त माया गुरु संप्रवाहम्। (1-1-12)
यदि स्म जानाति कुतो विलापः सीताकृतेऽनेन कृतः परेण। (1-1-14)

Lord Siva congratulated Parvati on her deep Bhakti (Love) which alone could induce in her this yearning to know the secret of Rama-tattwa (the reality behind Rama). He started describing the nature of the Paramatman (the Supreme Soul).

He explained it all by narrating a conversation between Rama, Sita and Hanuman, soon after Rama's coronation after returning from Lanka. Both Rama and Sita, by turn, explained the highest spiritual truth to Hanuman who was considered as the fittest to receive the Jnana because of his purity and intense devotion. This was called 'Rama Hrudayam'. Hearing or reading this Rama Hrudayam is itself a great Sādhana leading to liberation. Where the bondage is real, a solid spiritual practice (Sadhana) is essential. Where the bondage is only a delusion or imagination, hearing about the Truth repeatedly till it seeps into the marrows of our bones and results in unshakable inner conviction (not merely intellectual), will result in Moksha.

The Supreme Lord created the entire world out of His delusive power called 'Maya'. Actually 'Maya' is not the power of the Lord. It is the circumstance happening out of the limitation of our senses which cannot grasp things (i.e. ignorance or

ajnana) beyond certain limits (for instance ears cannot hear very low noises or very loud noises) and the vast immensity of the 'GOD'. It is a natural result of our limitation called ignorance and the Infinite nature of the Lord. It is just like children calling facts beyond comprehension as 'Magic', but magic is not something concrete which exists as an 'entity'. It is the Lord Himself who is the 'subject' who is able to project Himself as all the 'objects' of the world including the Jivas. So the world is not different from the Supreme Being and the latter Himself is in all the objects. When an image is seen in the mirror, the image is not solid but a delusion. Further, both inside and outside the object, only the glass is there including the place where the image is seen. Similarly the world being delusory, there is nothing called inside or outside and there is only the Supreme Being. Due to the limitation of our senses we are unable to see the Supreme Lord who forms all the objects (after all, eyes cannot see the objects which are extremely closest and nothing can be closer than the God). As the Supreme Lord is the constitutional ingredient of all the creations (material cause like the clay making up a pot), He is called the Self (Atma) of

all beings. Just like a metallic plate kept in the Sun gets heated up (i.e. reflected heat), our individual intellect (Buddhi)[2] gets some reflected consciousness from the Supreme Lord and imagines itself in association with the body as an individual self called Jiva with a separate name and form. This is 'ego'–an imagined individual entity which we are not. We are not individuals but an integral part of the Totality or the Supreme Being. This is just like a zero watt bulb forgetting its oneness with the Total electricity in the Generator and all other bulbs and considering itself as a limited individual (there is, after all one electricity only which flows through all the bulbs of various potencies). If a beggar sees himself in a dream as a king sitting on a throne and talking to some twenty courtiers, all these people in the dream are the imagination of his mind and it is the dreamer who became the king and all his courtiers. In other words, all these people are not different from the dreamer. The individual souls (i.e. ego) are not different from the Supreme Lord. There is only one Totality and the individual is a myth. The Buddhi (intellect) has created this myth. The ego i.e. the individuality

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2. आभासस्तु मृषा बुद्धिरविद्याकार्यं मुच्यते।
अविच्छिन्नं तु तद्ब्रह्म विच्छेदस्तु विकल्पतः॥ (I-1-48)

exists due to our ignorance of the Truth (ajnana), which has covered our mind. While the Self alone exists[3] in its pristine purity of knowledge without any trace of ignorance, we who mistakenly consider the body-mind complex as our Self (limited) consider ourselves as ignorant, thus superimposing our ignorance on the Self which is all-knowledge. We thus revel in the mire of sansara and being attached to the various objects of the dream world like son, wife etc., engage ourselves in numerous activities. All activities take place in the Totality just as the light we get from a bulb is from the total electricity generated from the generator and the individual bulb is only a medium of its expression. Each person, identifying himself with the body-mind complex (bulbs) considers himself as the doer (karta) of all activities. Consequently as a result of good and bad actions he earns merit or sin (punya or papa) entitling him to prosperity or suffering (reward or punishment) as also to heaven or hell. To exhaust the punya or papa by experi-encing its entitlements (bhokta) he has to be born again and the cycle is repeated. Simultaneous with other

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3. स्वाज्ञानमप्यात्मनि शुद्धबुध्दे स्वारोपयन्तीह निरस्तमाये। (1-1-20)

practices a person should be convinced that he is neither a karta nor a bhokta and should never ascribe to himself the doership. Then the activities will not bind him by forging the chain of repeated births.

To summarise, the Paramatman or the Supreme Self is like Total Electricity generated. It is the Paramatman who manifests Himself in all various Beings, like the electricity in individual bulbs and this electricity in the bulbs is called Atman or the Self. Thus in effect, the electricity in the bulb is identical with the Totality of the Electric Power generated and beyond also with the electricity in all the bulbs. On that analogy, the Self or Atman is identical with the Paramatman but this fact is forgotten as the mind is covered by ignorance (avidya or maya). The Buddhi (intellect) which is an imagined link makes a person think that his body-mind complex is his real Self. This imagined entity is called Ego or Jiva. This ego (Jiva), which is an imagination in the Buddhi is the doer of activities, the experiencer of merit and sin (the fruit of activities) and is the one who transmigrates to hell or heaven and is subject to birth and death. The knowledge of the identification of the Atman

and Paramatman alone will release one from the imagi-nary bondage. This is explained in the Ramayanam by an illustration of the various divisions of the one undivided Space (Akasa). A space is something in which all the objects of the world are capable of being contained. This infinite space extending all over the universe is known as the Infinite Space (Mahakasa). When there is a pond with water, it occupies a space called the pond-space (Mathakasa). On the water of the space is reflected sky above with the sun, moon, stars etc. seeming to occupy a space superimposed on the water and this is called Image-space (Pratibimba Akasa). There is only one individual infinite space and all these divisions are imaginary.

Our intellect is like the pond where an image of the sky falls (reflected consciousness) and the image-space is called the Jiva or Jivatman (a limited and imaginary entity). This is also called the Ego. The buddhi, Jiva and ego are all identical. This reflected consciousness (ego) is unreal and perceived because of the inability (ignorance) of the intellect to understand the Supreme Self. The Supreme Brahman is indivisible and free from limitations. The division into the Jivas is only due

to the delusion of the mind. The various bodies of beings (including the intellect) which are like the bulbs in which the electricity glows and the entire world (of which the bodies form a part) are unreal (dream creations or imagination) and they are called the non-self (anatma). The Truth – that is the oneness or the identical nature of the Atman with Paramatman is revealed to us only through the great dicta (Mahavakyas) of the Vedas (Scriptures) like "TATTWAMASI– That Thou Art." "AHAM BRAHMASMI" – I am that Supreme Being" etc. The moment the real knowledge dawns on us[4] through the Mahavakyas, all the ignorance (avidya) because of which we are unable to realise the nature of the Supreme Lord, along with its effects (i.e. being embodied and getting involved in an imaginary world) is destroyed. To consider the limited Jiva as a doer and experiencer and not realizing its identity with the Brahman (the Totality) is called delusion. This delusion is destroyed. Any sincere devotee who loves God intensely attains this knowledge of oneness and becomes one with the Lord. Those

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4. ऐक्यज्ञानं यदोत्पन्नं महावाक्येन चात्मनोः।
तदाविद्या स्वकार्यैश्च नश्यत्येव न संशयः॥ (1-1-50)

who are devoid[5] of Bhakti (love and devotion) will be deluded and drowned in the pits of Scriptures. They will not be able to get liberation even after hundreds of births.

Rama is only another name[6] for Paramatman who alone exists, is all consciousness and is called Satchidanada. All sufferings stem from duality. When Brahman alone exists, it is all Bliss (Ananda). In a dream, when a person sees several objects like various people, houses etc. those objects are all unreal and are the mental projections of the dreamer who alone exists. In the same way, all the objects of the world are unreal and are the mental projections of the Supreme Lord who has become all the illusory objects. He is not subject to any changes and simply exists in His awareness just as the electricity in the bulb remains without any change while the bulb (i.e., the body) is subject to death (breakage or getting fused). It is the Self, which pervades all the three states of a person – viz., the waking, the dream and the sleeping state. We do not recognize Him in the waking state as

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5. मद्भक्ति विमुखानां हि शास्त्रगर्तेषु मुह्यताम्।
   न ज्ञानं न च मोक्षः स्यात्तेषां जन्मशतैरपि ॥ (I-1-51)

6. रामं विद्धि परं ब्रह्म सच्चिदानन्दमद्वयम्। (I-1-32)

the ego is super-imposed on Him. In the dream we are conscious of somebody seeing the dream as a witness and the ego is enacting with a name and form in the dream drama. That witness is the Self. In the sleeping state we are not conscious of the world or our bodies but we are all able to recall the pleasant sleep in the morning. This means that when we were sleeping, there was a watcher on the tower who witnessed the sleep and in the morning enabled us to recollect the experience. He is the Self or the Atman.

The delusive power, which created the imagination of a world with its objects, called Maya is also known as Prakriti (primordial nature). Sita is that Prakriti responsible for creation, sustenance and dissolution of the world. She is activated by and does all the activities in the presence of the Paramatman (Supreme Self) who is Rama. The Parmatman does nothing but Prakriti acts only in His presence. But people, in their ignorance, attribute all the activities to the Supreme Lord, Rama. Rama, the Supreme Lord is free from attachments and is a non-doer. All the acts and leelas done by Rama like the breaking of the bow of Lord Siva, going to the Dandaka forest, his agony

at Sita's kidnapping by Ravana, killing of Vali and all the demons including Ravana etc.[7] were all the projections of the Maya manoeuvered by Sita as Parkriti. The ignorant people attributed them all to Rama who is the Supreme Self, actionless and changeless. "Rama at no time made a single movement. He never walks, stands up, regrets, expects, abandons or does anything. He is all bliss, unmoving and immutable. It appears as if He has taken up the qualities of Maya on Himself."[8]

This is the Rama Hrudayam, which is deemed as fit to be kept as the most secret one. It contains the entire essence of Vedanta (philosophy). The one who reads it always with Bhakti is rid of all impurities and even the greatest of sins and becomes liberated.[9] This Rama Hrudayam is specially meant for all fallen people, sinners, murderers involved in matricide etc.; those involved in accumulation of money and adultery, thieves and

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7. एवमादीनि कर्माणि मयैवाचरितान्यपि।
आरोपयन्ति रामेऽस्मिन्निर्विकारेऽखिलात्मनि॥ (I-1-42)

8. रामो न गच्छति न तिष्ठति नानुशोच-
त्याकांक्षते त्यजति नो न करोति किञ्चित्।
आनन्दमूर्ति-रचलः परिणामहीनो
मायागुणाननुगतो हि तथा विभाति॥ (I-1-43)

dacoits who can attain the divine status difficult for even the Yogis, by reading it with Bhakti.

What a wonderful thing it is that Rama throws the door of this knowledge wide open to even the worst category of people while Vedantic texts, are selective in their customers by forbidding the passing of their knowledge to rogues, people with bad conduct and those lacking in austerities etc.

Parvati once again requested Lord Siva to narrate to her the entire story of Ramayana. Siva began to narrate it. Even to read or hear the story of Ramayana with devotion is an important spiritual sadhana which purifies a person of all sins, bestows all riches, wealth and prosperity, long life, good progeny, and finally leads him to the abode of Lord Vishnu[9]. Now starts the story of Ramayana.

Unable to bear the burden caused by the atrocities of the demons (rakshasas) led by the mighty Ravana, Mother Earth accompanied by Brahma approached Lord Vishnu and pleaded her case. Vishnu promised to do the needful, by being

9. (अ) श्रद्धान्वितः पठति यः शृणुयात्तु नित्यं
विष्णोः प्रयाति सदनं स विशुद्धदेहः॥ (7-9-73)
(आ)प्राप्नोति परमामृद्धिं दीर्घायुः पुत्रसन्ततिम्। (1-2-5)

born as the son of King Dasaratha. The various gods like Indra were asked to be born as monkeys in order to help Vishnu in his avatara.

At Ayodhya, King Dasaratha performed a sacrifice (yajna) called 'Putra Kameshti'. The Fire God appeared from the sacrificial fire and gave him some divine milk porridge (payasam) to be given to his three queens. In due course, Lord Rama was born to Kausalya on the ninth lunar day in Cancer ascendant and in the asterism of Punarvasu. He was adorned by numerous ornaments and had four arms carrying the conch, discus, mace etc.

His mother Kausalya was amazed and began to praise the Lord, full of happiness:–

"Oh Lord Vishnu, you are the Purushottama (best among all beings). It is you who create the world, sustain it and finally destroy it. You dwell equally in all beings but only the wise people are able to see you. Having been immersed in the ocean of sansara (phenomenal world) today I have come to your feet, Lord. Kindly ensure that this lovely form of yours will live in my mind always and let me not be covered by Thy

world-bewitching maya. Lord, please withdraw this unique form and become a small child to enable us to embrace it and have sweet talks." The Lord replied: -

"Yourself and Dasaratha had done austerities in your previous births desiring me to be born as your child. As a result of your past tapasya (austerities), you have been able to see this rare form of mine and the sight of this form bestows moksha (liberation). Whosoever hears or reads this conversation between us will be able to have my remembrance at the time of death and will also have a Saroopya Moksha (where one gets the same form as the Lord)." Sri Rama then became a small child and began to weep.

In the meantime, Kaikeyi gave birth to Bharata and Sumitra to twins - Lakshmana and Satrughna. The name 'Rama' was given to denote the one in whom all the sages and saints revelled when once their ignorance was destroyed through the higher knowledge.

In this Ramayana, Vyasa has given some episodes from the child-like sport of Rama, which are more or less identical with the leelas of Krishna.

One day Rama was hungry and as his mother did not take notice of it, he became angry and was hitting at all the vessels with a stick. He also poured out all the curds, butter etc. and distributed them to his brothers. When Kausalya came to catch them, they all ran away. Kausalya pursued Rama and caught hold of his hand but without admonishing him or telling anything. Rama began to weep slowly. They grew up and under the tutelage of Vasistha, mastered all the knowledge and became experts in archery, horseriding and all the subjects.

One day Sage Kausika known also as Visvamitra, having known through his yogic powers that the Supreme Lord had incarnated as Rama, came to Ayodhya with the intention of seeing the latter. Having been given a proper welcome by King Dasaratha, he requested the king to let him take Rama and Lakshmana with him. This was necessary because he wanted to have them kill two demons called Maricha and Subahu and their followers who were giving trouble to him every day by obstructing his worship of the God. If this request were to be acceded to, it would be auspicious to the king.

Dasaratha could not brook any mention of his separation from his most beloved son Rama and he was also afraid of the curse of Visvamitra if he were to refuse to send his sons. Vasishtha counselled the king – "Look, my dear king, I shall tell you something which has to be kept as a top secret. Rama is not a human child but is verily the Supreme Lord. Similarly, Lakshmana is Adi Sesha (the serpent bed of the Lord). The Maya of the Lord is born as Sita, the daughter of Janaka. Lord's mission in this world is to reduce the burden of demons on this Mother Earth. Visvamitra has come with a view to manoeuvre the marriage of Rama with Sita". Dasaratha called Rama and Lakshmana and handed them over to Visvamitra. After crossing the river Ganga, when they came to 'Tataka Vanam', they came face to face with Tataka a fierce demoness who had been giving trouble to the entire world. Rama killed her with a single arrow. A beautiful nymph emerged out of her body, prostrated to Rama and headed for the heaven. She had become a demoness on account of a curse and was now liberated by Rama's grace. Then Viswamitra was extremely pleased and instructed Rama in the secrets and the use of

various Astras (divinised arrows) along with the secret use of the Mantras (sacred syllables). The next day morning they reached Siddhasrama where Visvamitra had his dwelling. Sage Viswamitra along with many other sages started his yajna (fire sacrifice) guarded by the two princes.

By noon, the two demons, Maricha and Subahu were seen raining blood and bones all over. Rama sent two arrows. One of them sent Maricha flying hundreds of kilometers away and threw him into the ocean. The second arrow took the form of fire and reduced Subahu to ashes. The rest of the followers were all killed by Lakshmana. Visvamitra's joy knew no bounds.

He started for the capital of Janaka along with the princes and other sages, in order to show to Rama a unique bow of Lord Siva kept in the custody of King Janaka.

Enroute they reached Gautama's ashram where Ahalya, the wife of Gautama Maharshi, having been cursed by the latter had been doing difficult tapasya (austerities) without food and water thinking of Rama with one pointed

mind, standing on a rock invisibly for several thousands of years. At the behest of Visvamitra, Rama touched the stone and Ahalya, freed from the curse, was standing before him. Ahalya began to praise Rama:-

"Oh Lord, I am thankful to you for touching me with the dust of your lotus feet, which even Gods like Brahma and Siva long for. You have deluded the world in your disguise as a man. You are the formless reality without any senses like feet but you are always moving. What merit (punya) I must have done in my past that I am able to see you face to face ! I will not worship anybody other than Rama who has taken a beautiful human form, with a bow in his hand. In my heart I always think[10] of that Rama the dust of whose feet are being searched for by all the scriptures and the chanting of whose name is appreciated and enjoyed by Lord Siva.

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10. यत्पाद-पङ्कज-रजः श्रुतिभिर्विमृग्यं यन्नाभिपङ्कजभवः कमलासनश्च।
यन्नामसाररसिको भगवान्पुरारिस्तं रामचन्द्रमनिशं हृदि भावयामि।।
(I-5-47)

It is the greatest blessing that this Rama is the same Infinite Supreme Being who is self-effulgent and has taken up this world–bewitching illusory body. I take refuge in Him.[11]

"I bow to your lotus feet which Lakshmi has hugged to her breast and is fondling them with love. You had measured all the three worlds by one foot of yours (as Trivikrama). You became the object of meditation only to those sages who have no trace of ego in them.

"You are both inside and outside everywhere like the Space. Still you remain untainted and detached .You are motionless, pure, enlightened and an immutable Reality.

"Lord grant me that wherever I may remain, I may have an unflinching love towards your lotus feet always, at all times.[12]

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11. सोऽयं परात्मा पुरुषः पुराण एकः स्वयंज्योतिरनन्त आद्यः।
मायातनुं लोकविमोहनीयां धत्ते परानुग्रह एव रामः॥ (I-5-49)

12. देव मे यत्र कुत्रापि स्थिताया अपि सर्वदा।
त्वत्पाद-कमले सक्ता भक्तिरेव सदास्तु मे॥ (I-5-58)

"I bow to you[13], the chief among men. I bow to you, who is all loving to all Bhaktas (devotees). Oh Lord of my senses, Oh Narayana, I bow to you.

"I worship Rama[14] along with his brother, who is the only one who is capable of dispelling the fear of Sansara. He is shining as crores of Suns. He holds the bow and arrow in his hand and is shining like a dark cloud. He is wearing a lovely golden garment. He is wearing the ear-rings made of diamond and has broad eyes like a lotus."

Having offered her prayers, Ahalya went away and joined her husband.

The one who reads this stotra with love and devotion will have all his desires fulfilled. The one who reads it with bhakti while concentrating on Rama with the desire for getting a son will beget a child within a year

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13. नमस्ते पुरुषाध्यक्ष नमस्ते भक्तवत्सल।
नमोऽस्तु हृषीकेश नारायण नमोस्तु ते॥ (I-5-59)

14. भवभयहरमेकं भानुकोटिप्रकाशं करधृतशरचापं कालमेघावभासम्।
कनकरुचिरवस्त्रं रत्नवत्कुण्डलाढ्यं कमलविशदनेत्रं सानुजं राममीडे॥
(I-5-60)

even if the mother is declared to be barren. Ultimately, freed from all sins, the reader of this stotra will be united with the Supreme Brahman.

Visvamitra continued on his way to Mithila. There is a fascinating interlude, which has been repeated by Tulasidas in Ramacharit Manas (Ramayana). They had to cross the River Ganga. The boatman refused Rama's entry into his boat. He told:-

"Sir, I cannot allow you into my boat unless you allow me to wash your feet first to remove all the dust from it. It is well known that the dust of your feet turned a stone into a woman. There is not much difference between my boat made of wood and a stone. If my boat is turned into a woman, I shall lose my only means of livelihood and my family will come into trouble. So, please allow me to wash your feet." Rama smilingly allowed him to wash his feet. When they met Janaka, the king of Mithila, at Viswamitra's behest, the mighty Siva's bow was brought before them, drawn by 5,000 labourers. Rama took it in play with his left hand and when he just drew back the string

of the bow, the entire bow broke into two pieces with a frightening sound. As Janaka had promised to give his daughter Sita in marriage to the warrior who handled the bow, Sita came with a golden garland and put it on Rama. Dasaratha also came to Mithila with all his family members, courtiers etc. and Sita was married to Rama in the traditional Vedic manner. Rama's brothers were also married simultaneously to Janaka's brother's daughters as also his own daughter.

When, after the marriage, the entire entourage started for Ayodhya, enroute, the famous Parasurama with a bow and an axe in his hands who was famous for killing numerous proud kshatriya kings, blocked their way. With all the arrogance at his command, he challenged Rama for a duel and said:–

"Why should you boast of having broken an old and dilapidated bow of Lord Siva? Draw this bow of mine which belongs to Lord Vishnu and then let us fight a duel." Rama snatched that bow, put his own arrow on it and kept it drawn. He asked Parasurama – "My arrow can never be wasted. On which target shall I send

this arrow? Shall I destroy with this arrow your prospects in this and other worlds or shall I hit at your feet so that you will be prevented from going anywhere in this world or in the other world?"

Parasurama began to offer his praises to Rama:-

"Now I recognize that you are the ancient Supreme Being Narayana Himself. Long back, Lord Vishnu left a part of the power of His Pure Consciousness in me and promised to take it back when He would incarnate as Rama, the son of Dasaratha. Now I remember it. Blessed I am that you have appeared before me.

"Just as the bubbles in the water, though they seem to be apart from the water, are not different from it, Maya is dependant on you, has you as its content and does its work. Maya is not something apart from you. Being surrounded by Maya (avidya), people do not understand you. As we do not do any self-enquiry (vichara), the ignorance continues. On account of this ignorance (avidya), the Power of Consciousness which gets reflected in the

body-mind complex is known as Jiva (the individual soul). So long as you identify yourself with and think that "I am the body, I am the intellect etc." the ego that I am the doer or experiencer, I am a sinner, I am happy or unhappy etc. continues. The Self has no birth or death. The intellect has no consciousness. It is insentient. On account of lack of discrimination we do not discriminate between the Self and the intellect (Buddhi). The mind (chitta) which is insentient begins to think that it is conscious (chetana) due to its association with the Self (Atman).

"Till such time as we seek[15] the company of Lord's devotees, a man can never escape from the never-ending onslaught of sorrows and miseries. As a result of this satsanga (holy company)[16] one develops love and devotion (bhakti) towards you (Rama, the Supreme Lord) and begins to worship you. Then slowly Maya begins to leave one and the ignorance

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15. यावत्त्वत्पादभक्तानां सङ्गसौख्यं न विन्दति।
तावत्संसार दुःखौघान्न निवर्तेन्नरः सदा॥ (1-7-38)

16. तत्सङ्गलब्धया भक्त्या यदा त्वां समुपासते।
तदा माया शनैर्याति तानवं प्रतिपद्यते॥ (1-7-39)

becomes thinner and thinner. Then the person gets the[17] Paroksha (indirect) knowledge of yourself (Rama) and also gets a sadguru. From the sadguru he gets the knowledge of Maha Vakyas like "That Thou Art" and then by your (Rama's) Grace gets liberated. Those who are bereft of your bhakti can neither get the Supreme Knowledge nor mukti (liberation) nor happiness even after hundreds of crores of kalpas.

"Let whatever merits (Punya) have been earned by me for attaining other planes of existence (loka) like the heaven be entirely taken away by your arrow. I bow to you again and again. Please grace me that I always continue to have the company of your devotees and have firm devotion to your feet."

Parasurama also requested that whosoever reads this praise (Stotra) of Parasurama should be endowed with bhakti even if he had none earlier and with remembrance of the Lord at the last moment of his life.

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17. ततस्त्वद्ज्ञानसम्पन्नः सद्गुरुस्तेन लभ्यते।
वाक्यज्ञानं गुरोर्लब्ध्वा त्वत्प्रसादाद्विमुच्यते॥ (I-7-40)

Parasurama went away to Mahendra Mountain and Rama to Ayodhya along with his wife, brothers, father and all the retinue. After sometime his brothers Bharata and Satrughna went away to their uncle's (Yudhajit) house to spend a few months there.

BALA KĀNDA COMPLETED

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Part-II

AYODHYA KĀNDA

One day, the great Divine Sage Narada came to Bhagavan Rama in order to remind him of the purpose of his Avatar, i.e., to rid the world of the wicked demons like Ravana.

King Dasaratha informed his traditional priest Vasishtha and his chief Minister Sumantra that he had decided to coronate Rama the eldest son, in the kingdom of Ayodhya the very next day as he had become old and all the senior citizens as also his ministers have been full of praise for Rama. He ordered Vasishtha to inform Rama and to make all preparations.

Vasishtha went to Rama and as he was already aware that Rama was verily the Supreme Lord who had taken the form for the destruction of Ravana, began to praise him.

Adhyatma Ramayanam is full of Stutis (poems of praise) of the Lord by various persons and each of them claims that to hear or read those praises is a great Sadhana. These Stutis or praises are only

prayers from the mouth of sages, devotees and various gods etc. A prayer is supposed to contain four factors:-

(1) Our (Jiva's) undeservedness, humility and lack of qualifications either to do sadhana or to get the grace.

(2) The Lord's glorious and lovable qualities like generosity, easy accessibility, inexhaustible love, immense mercy etc.

Note: 1 and 2 ensure that our ego is reduced.

(3) Expression of our own desire to have Lord's darshan (realisation) and an exclusive longing for Him alone (This will reduce our attachement to worldly objects).

(4) The last is surrender i.e. complete dependence on God and God alone, we ourselves being utterly helpless like a newborn child.

The very prayers in the Puranas (epics) if repeated or heard by us with faith and devotion will purify our hearts and make us fit for God-realisation or liberation.

Forgetting the world (i.e. vairagya) is a must for God-realisation. Reading or hearing the story as

narrated in Adhyatma Ramayana will fix our attention so totally on the sports of the special manifestations of the Supreme God that it results in forgetting our house, friends, office and the entire world (Prapancha Vismaranam). In addition, the profuse philosophical teachings which are interspersed with the story will also inspire the seekers.

To revert to the narration of the story, Vasishtha prayed:–

"Lord, I am supposed to be your Guru but you are the Guru of all the Gurus in this world. You are the indweller in our heart and the leader of our pilgrimage on this earth, though invisibly. You have assumed a body of pure consciousness with your Maya and behave like a man in this world for fulfilling a divine mission. Lord, grant me a boon that the Maya (Power of delusion) which is under your control may never enslave me. You may consider this as the fees (Dakshina) for my being formally your guru." Then he also informed him of his impending coronation the next day morning.

In the meantime, Manthara a hunchbacked female attendant of Kaikeyi went to the latter and

poisoned her mind by telling that if once Rama were to take over the kingdom, Bharata would remain as his servant while Kaikeyi would be reduced to the status of being a servant to Kausalya. It was also significant that Dasaratha had managed to send away Bharata to his uncle's house. Manthara reminded her of the two boons promised to her earlier by Dasaratha long back and kept in reserve. She persuaded Kaikeyi to pretend to be angry and to ask for the boons when the King Dasaratha came to supplicate her. The two boons were that Bharata should be installed as the ruler of Ayodhya and Rama was to be banished to live in a forest for fourteen years from the very next day. In this context it is very clear that we should avoid the company[18] of wicked people as it would easily corrupt our minds, even if we happen to be full of good qualities and conduct, with high moral values and high devotion to the Guru, highly learned and

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18. (अ) धीरोऽत्यन्त-दयान्वितोऽपि सगुणाचारान्वितो वाथवा
नीतिज्ञो विधिवाददेशिकपरो विद्याविवेकोऽथवा।
दुष्टाना-मतिपाप-भावितधियां सङ्गं सदा चेद्भजे-
त्तद्बुद्ध्या परिभावितो भजति तत् साम्यं क्रमेण स्फुटम्॥
(II-2-82)

(आ)अतः सङ्गः परित्याज्यो दुष्टानां सर्वदैव हि। (II-2-83)

endowed with discrimination. This is a very important thing to be kept in mind during our sadhana period.

Kaikeyi followed the advice of Manthara to the letter. The king, who was shocked beyond measure, while agreeing to the first boon i.e., to make Bharata his heir to the kingdom tried to persuade her not to insist on banishing Rama to the forest. Kaikeyi was adamant and warned that if the king went back on his earlier promise to grant her two boons he would only to go to hell (naraka). Further she would commit suicide either by hanging herself or by taking poison. The king fell down unconscious like a dead man.

Kaikeyi sent for Rama and apprised him of the entire matter. She told him that in order to prevent his father from going back on his promise, Rama had to leave for the forest the very next day. This was incumbent on Rama as a dutiful son. By that time, King Dasaratha who had regained consciousness intervened and told Rama:–

"I am the one who is at the mercy of women and as such confused. You just put me in prison and grab the kingdom by force. In this manner, no sin due to breaking of promise will accrue to me."

Thus saying he began to cry loudly. But Rama consoled his father saying that he would leave for the forest immediately in order to fulfil the latter's promise and the Divine mission. Rama took leave of his mother Kausalya after consoling her. Lakshmana's rage knew no bounds on hearing this news and he burst out:- "I shall imprison Dasaratha who is mad with his infatuation for Kaikeyi, kill in fight Bharata or whoever opposes me and shall install you on the throne. You will behold my valour today."

Rama advised him thus:

"If only the kingdom[19], our bodies etc., which are seen by us were to be true and real, your efforts to secure the kingdom for me will have some meaning. All the enjoyments of the world are fleeting like the lightning. The ignorant people being unaware that they are already in the mouth of a big serpent called death undertake various actions day and night with great effort, seeking these imperma-nent enjoyments for the body. The body is different and separate from the Self.[20] The

19. यदिदं दृश्यते सर्वं राज्यं देहादिकं च यत्।
यदि सत्यं भवेत्तत्र आयासः सफलश्च ते॥ (II-4-19)

20. पितृमातृसुतभ्रातृदारबन्ध्वादि संगमः।
प्रपायामिव जन्तूनां नद्यां काष्ठौघवच्चलः॥ (II-4-23)

union with our parents, son, brother, wife etc. is just like the various pieces of wood, which meet in the current of the river temporarily and then go on their own ways. What is this world after all? It is all like a dream and one is beset with various diseases. It is all illusory. Everyday our life is ebbing out. The foolish people continue to run after enjoyments and they do not understand the reality.

The old age is standing[21] before us threatening like a female tiger. Identifying oneself with the body, a person says, "I am a famous king". The body is a house of worms, full of excretion and when it is burnt, it is reduced to a handful of ashes. How can this[22] body which is subject to transformation and changes be the Self ? Taking your stand on this body, you want to fight all the world. The idea that I am the body is called ignorance (avidya). The idea that I am not the body but I am the conscious spirit is the real knowledge (vidya). It is avidya which causes birth and death and it can be averted only through vidya. A seeker after moksha should practise[23] this vidya with all effort.

21. जरा व्याघ्रीव पुरत स्तर्जयन्त्यवतिष्ठते। (II-4-29)

22. विकारी परिणामी च देह आत्मा कथं वद। (II-4-31)

23. तस्माद्यत्नः सदा कार्यो विद्याभ्यासे मुमुक्षुभिः।
कामक्रोधादयस्तत्र शत्रवः शत्रुसूदन॥ (II-4-34)

Here, lust or desires (kama) and anger are the main enemies. Anger alone is enough to obstruct our path to moksha (liberation) and a man in rage does not hesitate to kill his own beloved relatives like father, brother etc. The mind[24] gets heated with anger. Anger binds you to the world. Anger destroys all your moral values. One must abandon anger and seek peace by being content with what one has.

The Self (Atman) is[25] pure, self-effulgent, changeless, formless and thoroughly distinct from the body, vital breath (Prana), intellect etc. Till one understands this fact one will continue to have sorrow and suffer. So, consider your Self as separate from the body and intellect. Whatever joy or sorrow befalls[26] you through your actions of past births, should be experienced by you. By doing actions which fall to your lot in the current of your life-tide you will not be tainted by Papa(Sin) or Punya(merit)."

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24. क्रोधमूलो मनस्तापः क्रोधः संसारबन्धनम्।
धर्मक्षयकरः क्रोधस्तस्मात्क्रोधं परित्यज।। (II-4-36)

25. आत्मा शुद्धः स्वयंज्योतिरविकारी निराकृतिः। (II-4-39)

26. भुञ्जन्प्रारब्धमखिलं सुखं वा दुःख मेव वा।। (II-4-41)
प्रवाहपतितं कार्यं कुर्वन्नपि न लिप्यसे। (II-4-42)

Advising thus, Rama informed Sita also of the impending journey to the forest that very day. He agreed to both Sita and Lakshmana accompanying him for the entire period of fourteen years.

When Rama came out walking on foot on the highway accompanied by Sita and Lakshmana all the citizens were overcome with grief and began to pour abuses on Kaikeyi who was responsible for this state of affairs. They all wanted to abandon Ayodhya and accompany Rama to the forest. Vamadeva, one of the sages present began to console them.

"This Rama is the Supreme Lord who is known as Vishnu or Narayana. He only became Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the sustainer) and Rudra (the destroyer). He had taken various Avatars like the great Fish (Matsya), the Boar (Varaha), Narasimha (half-lion man), Vamana etc. and is now masquerading as Rama, in order to kill crores of demons like Ravana who is not vulnerable to death except in the hands of a man. Sita is the Yoga Maya of the Lord responsible for the creation, sustenance and dissolution of the world. She is also known as Lakshmi. So Rama has to go to the forest in order to fulfil the purpose of his

avatar. Neither the king nor Kaikeyei is to be blamed for his forest trip.

Those who chant[27] Rama's name repeatedly will be free from all fears including of death. Where is the question of any suffering or sorrow for Rama? In Kaliyuga[28] liberation will be attained solely by taking Rama's name and not by any other means. This is the secret of Sita and Rama. Whoever thinks of it always is sure to get Vijnana (experiential knowledge) as also firm Bhakti."

Rama along with his followers was all dressed in tree-bark and having taken leave of his grief stricken father, left for the forest in a chariot driven by Sumantra and followed up to some distance by the citizens of Ayodhya.

Soon after Sumantra and other citizens left him, Rama went to the banks of holy Ganga on the second day and enjoyed the company of Guha, the king of Nishada (a tribe categorized in olden days as untouchables). Rama strictly observed his vow

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27. रामरामेति ये नित्यं जपन्ति मनुजा भुवि।
तेषां मृत्युभयादीनि न भवन्ति कदाचन॥ (II-5-26)

28. रामनाम्नैव मुक्तिः स्यात्कलौ नान्येन केनचित्॥ (II-5-27)

not to go inside any town or village and not to eat any fruits etc. brought by other people, for fourteen years. He slept on a mat of darbha grass that night. The next day Guha took him across the river in his boat. After visiting the great sage Bharadwaja he went to the Ashrama of Valmiki in Chitrakuta mountain. Rama requested Valmiki to direct him to a good place for staying for a few months. Valmiki smiled and said:– "Oh Rama, you are the best dwelling place for all people and for you, all the beings are your dwelling places. There are some special homes also for you as follows:–

The hearts of those saints[29] who are peaceful, treating equally all beings and not hating any are your home. In respect of those who have abandoned all dharmas[30] (duties) and adharmas (sinful actions) and are constantly worshipping you, their heart is the home of yourself and Sita. In respect of those who chant your Mantra (sacred words), surrendered themselves to you, bereft of

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29. शान्तानां समदृष्टीना मद्वेष्टृणां च जन्तुषु।
त्वामेव भजतां नित्यं हृदयं तेऽधिमन्दिरम्॥ (II-6-54)

30. धर्माधर्मान्परित्यज्य त्वामेव भजतोऽनिशम्।
सीतया सह ते राम तस्य हृत्सुखमन्दिरम्॥ (II-6-55)

pairs of opposite like heat and cold, joy and sorrow and are free from attachement their hearts are your home.[31] The mind of those[31] devotees who neither hate on getting something they dislike nor revel in joy on getting something pleasing and who whole-heartedly worship you after coming to the conclusion that all else is unreal and is of the nature of Maya, is your home. In respect of those whose minds have been[32] firmly entrenched in you by constant practise and those who are completely established in serving your holy feet and those whose sins have been destroyed by the glory of your name, you dwell along with Sita in their lotus hearts."

Valmiki narrated his own life story as to how, from being a thief and a murderer he was raised to the level of a Brahminic sage on account of chanting Ramnam on the reverse (as Marā, Marā) for a long time with an one-pointed mind. Then he took them to a place between the mountain and

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31. यो न द्वेष्ट्यप्रियं प्राप्य प्रियं प्राप्य न हृष्यति।
सर्वं मायेति निश्चित्य त्वां भजेत्तन्मनो गृहम्। (II-6-59)

32. निरन्तराभ्यासदृढीकृतात्मनां त्वत्पादसेवापरिनिष्ठितानाम्।
त्वन्नामकीर्त्या हतकल्मषाणां सीतासमेतस्य गृहं हृदब्जे॥ (II-6-63)

the Ganges and got constructed two hermitages with the help of his disciples. Rama along with Sita and Lakshmana began to live there.

In the meantime, to revert to the scene in Ayodhya, as soon as Sumantra returned and gave the consoling message of Rama to King Dasaratha, the latter left his life.

Bharata was brought back urgently from his uncle's house but was shocked to learn from his own mother, her manoeuvering to get the kingdom for her son Bharata and to banish Rama for fourteen years to a forest resulting in the demise of his own father. He was stuck with immense grief and after abusing his mother in no uncertain terms swore before Kausalya his own innocence by not being a party to his mother's devilish machination. He performed the last rites of his father. Bharata informed Vasishtha that he would be leaving the next day to bring back Rama to be installed on the throne. Till the return of Rama he vowed to live on fruits and roots, to sleep on the floor and to wear matted hair.

Bharata started on his journey the very next day escorted by Satrughna leading the entire army and accompanied by his mothers like Kausalya etc. and

Vasishtha. Enroute he met Guha the king of Nishadas on the bank of the Ganges. Guha was extremely pleased to see the unswerving and immense love of Bharata to Rama. He took them across the Ganges in his boats. Having availed of the hospitality of Bharadwaja Rishi, Bharata reached Chitrakuta along with his entire retinue. He then went to the cottage of Rama after keeping his army at a distance and met Rama and Sita. Rama embraced him with all love. He greeted his mothers, Vasishtha etc., as per tradition. On hearing of his father's demise he wept bitterly and others also followed his example.

Rama also performed all the rites due to be done for his dead father. All of them fasted that day. The next day Bharata approached Rama requesting him to come back and take over the kingdom. Bharata even offered to spend fourteen years in forest in place of Rama. Rama told Bharata "Whatever our father had ordained, we have no right to change his command. If we transgress the command of our father and do as we like, we will have to go to hell."

Bharata refused to go back and started to immolate himself in a fire in case Rama did not

agree to his remaining with Rama in the forest itself. Then Vasishtha took Bharata aside and revealed to him that Rama was no other than the Supreme God Narayana and Lakshmana was Adi Sesha. They had assumed the human form for the purpose of destroying Ravana, the king of rakhasas. Kaikeyi's asking for the two boons etc., was all willed by the Lord to enable him to fulfil his divine mission. He advised Bharata not to insist on Rama's return to Ayodhya but to return to Ayodhya himself with all his followers. Bharata was amazed to hear this divine secret. He begged for the sandals of Rama and got them. He took leave of Rama with all bhakti with these parting words – "If only you fail to return on the very next day after the ending of fourteen years, I shall enter into fire immediately."

Bharata went to Nandigrama (at the outskirts of Ayodhya), and installed the sandals of Rama on a throne. Daily he used to offer Pooja and flowers to the sandals as if offering to Rama himself and apprise the sandals of whatever work relating to the affairs of the kingdom took place each day. He himself led a very austere life of celibacy, sleeping on the ground, living on fruits and roots, with full

control over his senses and wearing matted hair and the bark-garment.

After some time, Rama left Chitrakuta and decided to go to the Dandaka forest. He first went to the Ashram of Atri Maharshi. Atri and his wife Anasuya presented Rama and Sita with many gifts.

Now, let us have a bird's eye view of the Sadhanas that emerge from the first two kāndas (Bala kānda and Ayodhya kānda), apart from the philosophical explanations of the relationship of GOD with the world and the Jivas, which have been explained in detail in the respective contexts. It has already been explained that reading or hearing entire Ramayana itself is a main Sadhana.

1. The world is like a dream and not real. God is capable of taking any human form like Rama and acting in the dream drama. Actually it looks as if he is performing actions but it is all the work of Maya. The Lord does not do any actions and is changeless.

2. The body is not our Self. There is no separate Jiva or individual soul. We are all the integrated parts of the Supreme Lord. All actions are done in totality. The Self and the

Pure Brahman are one. **One has to develop intense Bhakti for the Lord. It is Bhakti which leads one to the final knowledge**, when one becomes one with the Lord.

3. One should constantly pray like Kausalya to the Lord with sincerity to protect one from the clutches of Maya, which entangles and drowns one in Sansara.

4. The Avataras like Rama and Krishna are beyond doubt forms assumed by the Supreme Lord for the benefit of the seekers who are unable to think of a formless Reality. The forms and the formless Reality are the two sides of the same coin. Even the founder of Non-dualism viz. Adi Sankara had composed poems of praise on all conceivable gods with form like Ganesa including on Ganga, Narmada and Yamuna rivers which are deemed to be divine.

5. The spiritual life starts with seeking the company of holy men and saints – which is called Satsanga. It is that which generates love and devotion to the Lord. Then he gets a Sadguru who leads him to liberation. The

ultimate factor in liberation is the Grace of the Lord.

6. Prayers for Grace are an effective prelude to meditation. Any problems in material life or in spiritual life or in sadhana like meditation can all be got solved through prayers. We can adopt also and recite some of the poems of praise, which occur at various places in Ramayana.

7. Even if we are not able to have Satsanga, the company of bad and wicked people should be avoided at all costs.

8. We have to contemplate on the evanescent nature of worldly enjoyments, develop a distaste and detachment to enable us to forget the world. God and the World are at opposite ends. We have to abandon the World for catching God, to enable us to have perennial bliss and Shanti (Peace).

9. It is very important that we should submit ourselves and courageously bear all sufferings and sorrows which befall us, taking God's name constantly. Nobody else is to be blamed for these sorrows except our own

actions in previous births, whose reaction comes to us as sufferings in subsequent births.

10. Spiritual life is only a way of living our normal life in the best manner and it is not something separate confined to a few hours. We should develop equal love and behaviour towards all.

11. Leave all dharmas and adharmas and be wholly engaged in worshipping the Lord. In Kaliyuga, by chanting God's name alone (like Ramnam) one can attain liberation. Be free from hate and attachment. Accept what comes and leave off likes and dislikes.

12. Constant practice is essential as this alone can draw the Grace of God to ourselves. We should surrender ourselves to God with faith whole-heartedly. Chanting the mantra or the name of the Lord constantly at all times is the easiest way to liberation.

AYODHYA KĀNDA COMPLETED

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Part-III

ARANYA KĀNDA

Being shown the way by the disciples of Sage Atri, Rama crossed a river by a boat and entered into the Dandaka forest. The entire forest was frightening to look at. When once they sat under a tree near a tank, they saw Viradha, a large sized demon running towards them eating elephant, tiger, bison or any animal that came his way. Viradha tried to grab Sita but Rama cut off his hands and head so that he fell down dead. Viradha had been a demi-god (Vidyadhara) who was cursed to become a demon by Sage Durvasa without any cause. Now a lovely effulgent form emerged out of Viradha's body and began to praise and thank Rama for releasing him from the curse. He prayed to Rama:–

"Oh Lord Rama, grant me a boon that my mind should always remember your lotus feet, my tongue should always sing your name, and my ears should always be hearing the nectar of your leelas (sports). Let my hands always busy themselves with worshipping your feet and let my head always lie at your feet doing prostrations." Thus saying he left for the heaven.

More or less a similar prayer is made by the demi-gods (Nala and Koobara) to Lord Krishna, in Srimad Bhagavatam. As the author of this Ramayana is Vyasa, he has lifted many a sentence as they are from Srimad Bhagavatam and incorporated them or their ideas in this Ramayana too in several places.

Even a demon-like Viradha gets a good destination (sadgati) by the mere touch of Rama's arrow. Whether in anger or hate or love if only we adhere to the Lord's feet, we will also be blessed with His divine touch, which will transform us.

On the way, Rama met a sage called Sarabhanga. He said, "Rama, I was waiting for you all these years while doing my penance. Now that I have seen you, I want to leave this body without waiting to enjoy the fruits of the merits (Punya) I have earned. I dedicate and surrender to you all the Punya lying at my credit and then I shall have my liberation.

All the resident sages of the Dandaka forest came to see Rama. They were all aware that Rama was the Supreme Lord himself. They pleaded with Rama to release them from the tortures they were

subject to in the hands of the demons. They showed Rama around their Ashrams and the latter saw on the way the gory sight of detached hands, heads etc. lying everywhere, which were the remnants of the sages who while sitting in Samadhi, due to their lack of vigilance had been eaten away by the demons. Rama lived for some years in that area and visited several ashrams. Rama, interalia, went to the Ashram of Sutikshna, a disciple of Agastya, who was overjoyed at the former's arrival. He began to praise Rama:–

"Lord, I have always been chanting your Mantra and I am the slave of your slave. Though you remain invisible to the entire world you have yourself come before me with all compassion, seeing me drowned through your Maya in the well of house, son and wife. Even though you abide" in the hearts of all beings, you spread your net of Maya on those who turn their faces away from your Mantra Japa. Maya goes away from those who are constantly engaged in the Sadhana of your Mantra. You allot results proportionate to the

33. त्वं सर्वभूतहृदयेषु कृतालयोऽपि त्वन्मन्त्रजाप्यविमुखेषु तनोषि मायाम्।
त्वन्मन्त्रसाधनपरेष्वपयाति माया सेवानुरूपफलदोऽसि यथा महीपः॥
(III-2-29)

service rendered. Let the Jnanis (people of knowledge) know you to be the light of consciousness in a form devoid of all conditioning like Time and Space. As far as I am concerned please grant me that this fascinating form of yours, which stands before me, may remain shining in my heart forever. I desire nothing else."[34] Rama declared that whosoever reads this Stuti (song of praise) will possess good bhakti and his knowledge will become pure.

Next day Rama was taken by Sutikshna to see his Guru Agastya. Agastya also addressed a Stuti (song of praise). While summarising, he said[35]:- "Lord, the essence of my teaching to people is that only the company of holy men and saints is the main factor leading to Moksha.[36] Further, only those who have cultivated ceaseless devotion to you and worship you through your Mantras will attain

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34. जानन्तु राम तव रूपमशेषदेशकालाद्युपाधिरहितं घनचित्प्रकाशम्।
प्रत्यक्षतोऽद्य मम गोचर मेतदेव रूपं विभातु हृदये न परं विकाङ्क्षे॥
(III-2-34)

35. किं राम बहुनोक्तेन सारं किंचिद् ब्रवीमि ते।
साधुसङ्गतिरेवात्र मोक्षहेतुरुदाहृता॥ (III-3-36)

36. लोके त्वद्भक्तिनिरता स्त्वन्मन्त्रोपासकाश्च ये।
विद्या प्रादुर्भवेत्तेषां नेतरेषां कदाचन॥ (III-3-34)

the real knowledge and never others. Whether walking or sitting, please grant me that I may remember you at all times." Then he handed over a bow, an inexhaustible quiver for the arrows and a diamond-studded sword kept in his custody for this purpose by Devendra (king of Gods). They proceeded to the banks of Godavari to a place called Panchavati and Lakshmana built a nice dwelling place with grass and leaves. They began to live there happily.

RAMA GITA (BRIEF)

This is more popularly known as Lakshmana Gita (in North India) as this was meant for Lakshmana. The most detailed Rama Gita, which was also told to Lakshmana, occurs in the Uttara kānda (5th Chapter). Both these contain the highest philosophical truths. In Vedanta, hearing about these truths and contemplating on them constitutes the most intimate (antaranga) Sadhana.

One day, while in Panchavati when Rama was sitting alone, Lakshmana approached him and asked for the way to attain moksha covering bhakti (devotion), vairagya (dispassion), jnana and vijnana (experiential knowledge). As per Scriptures a Guru

is prohibited from telling any spiritual truth unless specifically asked for. One should ask and get clarified any doubts from Mahatmas. Raising a question of doubt implies humility and surrendering the ego of our own intellect.

Rama began to reply to Lakshmana's questions.

The reply can be divided into four parts:-

(1) Maya's nature (2) Aids or Sadhanas for getting knowledge (3) Jnana with Vijnana (4) That, which is worth knowing (Supreme Lord).

1. Maya's nature

"To consider the non-self objects like the body as our Self (or I) is called Maya and the phenomenal world is created by it. It is of two kinds:-

1. **Vikshepa:-** The one which projects something other than what it is i.e. the one which projects a non-existing world on the Brahman (Projecting Power).

2. **Avarana:-** (Power to hide) The one which hides the real knowledge or Brahman.

"There is Brahman alone, which is the ultimate Reality and the universe is an illusion super-imposed on the Brahman. It is just as in darkness a rope is perceived as a serpent and on proper enquiry, the serpent ceases to exist. Whatever is seen, heard or remembered by people is all unreal just as in the dream. Body-mind complex is the firm root on which the tree of sansara is standing. It is because we consider the body as 'I', the bondage of wife, son etc. arises. Even this body cannot be considered as 'I'. It is made up of the five elements like earth, water, fire, air etc., and of their subtle qualities like smell, taste, form, touch etc. respectively. The combination or assembly of the aforesaid elements etc., ego, intellect, the five senses of cognition, five senses of action, the mind (which is a reflection of consciousness) and the primordial nature (Prakriti) are known as the field (Kshetra). This field constitutes the body. The Jiva which resides in the body is as different from the body as the electricity is different from the bulb.

"Just as a pot is in reality the mud of which it is made and the pot is an imaginal super-imposition on the mud, the distinction between the body and Jiva is also due to super-imposition.

"Again just as the electricity in a bulb is the same as in all the bulbs as also in the generator, the Jiva is identical with the Paramatma (the totality) and so is bereft of joy or sorrow, like or dislike, sin or merit etc.

II. The aids or Sadhanas for getting Knowledge (Jnana)

"Lack of ego, abandoning hypocrisy and violence, tolerance of censure from others, straightforwardness, service to the Guru with all heart and soul, purity inside and outside, firmness in good actions, control over the mind, speech and body, detachment towards objects, contemplation on the facts of birth, old age etc., lack of attachment towards son, wealth etc., equanimity of mind in prosperity and adversity seeking places not crowded and disgust for the company of worldly people at all times, constant effort to get the knowledge of the Self and contemplating on the inner meaning of Vedanta (philosophy) and last but not the least – unswerving remembrance of Rama, the Supreme Lord – these are the essential aids to get right knowledge.

3. Jnana with Vijnana

"The oneness or the identity of the Atman (Jiva) with Paramatma (Supreme Lord) is called Jnana. On getting the knowledge, the primal ignorance (Moola Avidya) is destroyed and dissolves into the Supreme Lord along with all cause and effect. That state is called Mukti. This state is also illusory; as the bondage for the ever free soul has been imagined, a stage of liberation also has to be imagined. I (Rama) have thus told you Jnana, Vijnana and Vairagya. But the Atman becomes visible and shining only to those who have devotion to me.

4. That, which is worth knowing (Supreme Lord)

In those who are constantly engaged in spiritual practices, unswerving bhakti can be cultivated by

1. Keeping company with holy men (Satsanga)
2. Service to God and his devotees
3. Fasting on Ekadasi etc.
4. Celebrating the seasonal festivals of God
5. Attachment to hearing, reading and expounding on stories of Lord's leelas.
6. Being established in Pooja to the Lord and
7. Chanting the name of God.

Automatically when[37] bhakti is generated, the Sadhak will get Vairagya early and get liberated by attaining Jnana and Vignana.

Lastly, the seeker[38] who is always making efforts, seeks the company of the bhaktas of the Lord and serves them, who has a pure mind, is always busy with my service and possesses an introverting and calm mind, Moksha is in his palm and he will be able to see me, not otherwise."

One day a rakshasi (demoness) called Surpanakha, a sister of the Demon - King Ravana was passing by Panchavati where she happened to see the footprints of Rama containing the marks of the designs of lotus, vajra (a weapon of Lord Indra) etc. Her lust was aroused on seeing the beauty of the feet and she went to Rama's hermitage. She wanted to take to live with her either Rama or Lakshmana both of whom made fun of her.

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37. अतो मद्भक्तियुक्तस्य ज्ञानं विज्ञानमेव च।
वैराग्यं च भवेच्छीघ्रं ततो मुक्तिमवाप्नुयात्॥ (III-4-51)

38. भक्तानां मम योगिनां सविमलस्वान्तातिशान्तात्मनां
मत्सेवाभिरतात्मनां च विमलज्ञानात्मनां सर्वदा।
सङ्गं यः कुरुते सदोद्यत-मतिस्तत्सेवनानन्यधी-
मोक्षस्तस्य करे स्थितोऽहमनिशं दृश्यो भवे नान्यथा॥ (II-4-55)

Ultimately Lakshmana had to disfigure her by cutting off her nose and ears. She ran away crying to her brother Khara (a rakshasa) with whom she was living in Janasthanam – a place not far off from Panchavati. Khara along with his entire army of demons and accompanied by Trisira and Dooshana invaded Rama. Rama left Sita in charge of his brother in a cave and went alone to fight with them. He fought alone and killed all the rakshasas (demons). If only we make Lord Rama manifest in our heart with our love, devotion and meditation, all the vasanas e.g. lust, anger, greed etc. which are depicted as demons will be annihilated by Rama.

Surpanakha who was witnessing the fight was stunned by this unexpected turn of events, ran away to Lanka and fell at the feet of her brother Ravana, the ten-headed king of rakshasas crying all the while. She reprimanded Ravana for not having a proper intelligence department of spies who had failed to keep him apprised of Rama's presence in the Dandaka forest and the ignominious death of Khara and his entire army in a battle with Rama who killed them all in a trice single handedly. She narrated to Ravana how Sita was extraordinarily beautiful befitting a husband like Ravana and how

she was left disfigured by Lakshmana while she attempted to lift Sita for gifting her to Ravana, ultimately leading to the death of Khara etc. Ravana was unable to understand as to how such a powerful warrior like Khara and his entire army could have been exterminated single-handedly by Rama, an ordinary man. He concluded that perhaps it was the Supreme Lord Himself who had come to kill him at the request of Lord Brahma. In case Rama turned out to be God himself he will die and rule over Vaikuntha by Lord's Grace. Otherwise, he could kill him if Rama was an ordinary man and continue to rule over the kingdom of rakshasas. Thus musing, he prayed to the Lord to bestow him with His Grace even though he was going to face Rama with an inimical intent knowing well that he was Lord Hari. He decided to adopt a ruse and win over Rama by a trick. He went to the abode of Maricha, his uncle who was dressed in the raiment of rishis with matted hair and immersed in the meditation of the Supreme Being who was devoid of all attributes and adjuncts (upadhis). Ravana sought his help and requested him to go before Rama taking the form of an amazingly unique deer, thus entice and decoy

Rama and Lakshmana to a place far away from his hermitage so that in their absence he himself would go to the hermitage and abduct Sita. As Maricha knew Rama's valour and had a first hand experience of it, he was unwilling to stick his neck out. Ravana threatened to kill him with his sword if he refused to comply with his plan. Maricha considered it better to die at the hands of Rama the God Supreme rather than to die by the sword of a cruel rakshasa, a sinner. Maricha took the form of a lovely golden deer with silvery spots on the body and with its horns and hooves being of diamond and went near the hermitage of Rama. It sometimes came very near to Sita and suddenly ran away and was thus running in the vicinity capturing the heart of Sita who was captivated by its flirtingly playful antics.

In the meantime, Rama who already knew what was to happen, called Sita aside and told her of the plan of Ravana to abduct her. He asked her to remain invisible in the fire for one year after keeping an illusory shadow Sita in her place in the hermitage. Sita followed his command and after installing a maya Sita, she herself disappeared into the fire.

The illusory Sita, on seeing the unique golden deer requested Rama to secure it for her to play with. Leaving her in charge of Lakshmana, Rama went behind the deer. The deer lured Rama away by suddenly appearing nearby and disappearing by running away. It was clear to Rama that it was a demon in disguise and so he hit it with an infallible arrow. The deer fell down dead assuming its original demon's form. While falling down, it imitated Rama's voice and cried loudly "I am gone. Oh Lakshmana, save me, quickly." While the name of Rama alone is adequate to bestow moksha, as Maricha died in the hands of the Lord looking at latter's face, a brilliant light came out of his body and entered into Rama. This is the glory of Rama that a sinner who habitually tortured the Rishis could get such a high state. Whether a man of high caste[39] or a demon or a sinner or a man of virtues, whoever leaves his body remembering Rama reaches the highest destination.

On hearing the deceitful cry of Maricha, Sita took it to be the cry of Rama for help and refused to be persuaded otherwise by Lakshmana whom

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39. द्विजो वा राक्षसो वापि पापी वा धार्मिकोऽपि वा।
त्यजन्कलेवरं रामं स्मृत्वा याति परं पदम्॥ (III-7-24)

she began to abuse in mean and insulting words. Unwillingly though, Lakshmana hurried to Rama's side whom he found safe and sound.

On seeing this situation, Ravana came to Sita disguising himself as a sage with a shining danda (holy stick) and a kamandalu (water receptacle) in his hands. Sita invited him in with all respect and offered him a repast of roots and fruits. Ravana revealed his true identity and invited her to come with him and be a partner in his enjoyments. Sita rebuked him and threatened him with dire consequences on Rama's return. Ravana took up his original ten-headed form and carried her along with the earth on which she stood by digging it up, without touching her body. This was because of a curse that he would die if ever he were to touch any woman against her wish. Ravana sat in his chariot along with her and flew by air.

Enroute, Jatayu, an old but mighty vulture and a friend of Dasaratha gave a good fight to rescue Sita but fell down mortally wounded with its wings clipped off by Ravana. Sita went along crying and calling Rama for help. On the way, when she saw five big monkeys sitting on the top of a hill, she dropped her ornaments tying them in a piece of

her cloth requesting the monkeys to inform Rama. Ravana crossed over the ocean, went to Lanka, installed her at the Ashokavanam, a grove inside his harem, in the custody of several rakshasis and continued to look after her as if she was his own respected mother.

In the meantime, both Rama and Lakshmana hurried towards the hermitage instinctively suspecting some untoward happening only to find that Sita was not there. Immediately, both of them left searching for Sita. On the way Jatayu who was lying wounded and in his last moments gave them the news of Sita's abduction. Rama fondled Jatayu who died with the happiness of Bhagavan's presence at the last moment of his death. Rama performed the last rites for Jatayu who, in a resplendent divine form sat in an aerial vehicle (vimana), praised Rama and went away to Vaikuntha, the Lord's home. The grief stricken brothers went on their way searching for Sita. On the way, Rama killed Kabandha – a deformed and disabled demon who grabbed them with his long hands in order to put them into his stomach, his head having been sunk into the stomach. As directed by Kabandha they reached the ashram of Sabari, a low caste woman thoroughly devoted to and waiting for a number of years to see Rama.

Sabari's joy knew no bounds. She washed their feet with love and devotion and offered them sweet fruits collected by her.

Rama instructed her how to get Bhakti and what were its aids:

> "Being a man or a[40] woman, belonging to higher or lower castes or stations in life or having a name do not play any part in getting me, the Supreme Lord. Bhakti is the only factor. I cannot be seen by anybody who is devoid of bhakti."

Rama enumerated the nine progressive aids for cultivating bhakti (loving devotion) as follows:

1. Satsanga or company of holy men (This is the first step which may be likened to the lighting of a lamp, from which other lamps could be lighted.)
2. Hearing stories of Lord's glory.
3. Describing the lovable qualities of the Lord.
4. Expounding on the meaning of Lord's spiritual instructions (as in Bhagavad Gita).

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40. पुंस्त्वे स्त्रीत्वे विशेषो वा जातिनामाश्रमादयः।
न कारणं मद्भजने भक्तिरेव हि कारणम्॥ (III-10-20)

5. Virtuous behaviour, carrying out the dos and donts of scriptures like yama and niyama – e.g., non-stealing, celibacy, external cleanliness, reading of scriptures etc.,

6. Constantly and firmly being established in God's Pooja (worship).

7. Chanting of Mantras along with their necessary pre-requisites like Nyasa (purificatory process) etc.

8. Worship of Lord's Bhaktas[41] (as the divinity is higher in them), to see Divinity and Lord's form in all beings and desirelessness towards all external objects.

9. The last but most[41] important one is contemplation and enquiry into the final Reality behind the entire world (TATTWA VICHARA)

With the practice of the Sadhanas mentioned above, Bhakti in the form of extreme love is

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41. मद्भक्तेष्वधिका पूजा सर्वभूतेषु मन्मतिः।
बाह्यार्थेषु विरागित्वं रामादि-सहितं तथा॥ (III-10-27)

generated. Bhakti leads to the direct[42] experience of the only Reality. Such a sadhaka gets final liberation (mukti) in this birth.

Sabari told Rama that Sita was at that time in Lanka and also advised him to go to Rishyamooka mountain near River Pampa and to make friends with Sugriva the king of monkeys, who was living with his four ministers in fear of his life from Vali, his mighty brother. Sabari entered into fire in the presence of Rama and attained moksha.

Devotion to Bhagavan Ramachandra[43] leads to liberation. Let all people serve with zeal the lotus feet of Rama capable of granting all desires.

ARANYA KĀNDA COMPLETED

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42. भक्तौ सञ्जातमात्रायां मत्तत्त्वानुभवस्तदा।
    ममानुभवसिद्धस्य मुक्तिस्तत्रैव जन्मनि॥ (III-10-29)

43. भक्तिमुर्क्तिविधायिनी भगवतः श्रीरामचन्द्रस्य हे
    लोकाः कामदुघाङ्घ्रिपद्मयुगलं सेवध्वमत्युत्सुकाः।
    नानाज्ञानविशेषमन्त्रवितर्तिं त्यक्त्वा सुदूरं भृशं
    रामं श्यामतनुं स्मरारिहृदये भान्तं भजध्वं बुधाः॥ (III-10-44)

Part-IV

KISHKINDHA KĀNDA

Lord Siva continued his narration of Ramayana.

Rama and Lakshmana came to Pampa river near Rishyamooka mountain. Sugriva the Vānara king saw them from the mountain top. As Vali was personally prevented by a curse from venturing into this mountain, Sugriva suspected that these were perhaps the emissaries of Vali, despatched for killing him. He requested his trusted lieutenant Hanuman to go and find out who they were. Hanuman took the disguise of a brahmachari and accosted the princes of Ayodhya. Rama was impressed with Hanuman's scholarliness and behaviour. He revealed their identity and the purpose of their visit viz., searching for Sita. Hanuman also narrated the story of Sugriva who was driven out of the kingdom of Kishkindha by his brother Vali due to a misunderstanding and how his wife had been taken away from him. He wanted Rama to become Sugriva's friend so that they could be mutually helpful in securing the release of their wives from the captors. He took

Rama and Lakshmana on his shoulders and flew upto the top of the mountain where Sugriva was waiting. Rama met Sugriva and both the parties swore their friendship to each other, in the presence of fire (as a witness). Then Sugriva handed over the bundle of ornaments dropped on the way by the crying Sita. On recognising them, Rama began to weep bitterly like a common man. Sugriva consoled him and promised to help him in retrieving Sita by killing Ravana. When Rama also promised to render him all help in his overcoming Vali in a fight, Sugriva put him to certain practical tests to ensure whether Rama could match the immense strength of Vali and was fully satisfied.

Rama persuaded Sugriva to go to Vali and challenge him for a fight immediately. Sugriva went accordingly and fought with Vali but was badly beaten up by the latter. Rama who was hiding behind the tree was unable to aim his arrow, as both the monkeys were identical in their form and thus indistinguishable from each other. He put a garland of flowers on Sugriva when he returned and persuaded him to go for a second time immediately and to engage Vali in a duel. Even though Tara his wife dissuaded Vali from going

again suspecting some foul play, Vali did not heed to her advice. While Vali was fighting, Rama made him his target and sent an arrow from his hiding place behind two trees. Vali fell down mortally wounded and surprised. Rama came and stood before Vali in all his glory. Vali upbraided him for his heinous act of killing him from a hide-out which was unbecoming of a warrior of such an illustrious race as Ikshwakus. He himself could have more easily rescued Sita from the hands of Ravana.

Rama told him that it was his bounden duty to punish him for his transgression of Dharma (virtuous path) in enjoying with the wife of his own brother Sugriva. Vali could then recognise him as Rama the consort of Lakshmi, the Supreme Bhagawan. He said[44] "You are the Lord by taking whose name even in a wrong context without the proper intention, Ajamila who was about to die, got moksha. It is my luck that you are standing before me in the last moment of my life. Please shower your mercy on my son Angada and make my end painless by touching me with your hands." Bhagawan Rama extracted the arrow and placed

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44. यन्नाम विवशो गृण्हन् म्रियमाणः परं पदम्।
यातिं साक्षात्स एवाद्य मुमूर्षोर्मे पुरः स्थितः ॥ (IV-2-67)

his hands on Vali who reached such a higher plane, which was difficult to be reached even by the great renunciates and 'Paramahansas'.

Vali's wife Tara came out weeping profusely and pleaded with Rama to kill her also. Rama then consoled her:

"Your husband does not deserve to be grieved for. Tell me whether your husband is the body or the Jiva. If the body is your husband, it is insentient and made up of blood, flesh, skin and bones and created by karma. It is very much before you. If you consider Jiva as your husband, then he has no birth or death, indestructible, all-pervasive and has no sex-male, female etc. He remains untainted like the space."

Tara then questioned Rama – "This body is lacking in Consciousness like the wood while Jiva is permanent and all Consciousness. Please tell me who is the one that experiences joy and sorrow?"

Rama explained: – So long as the ego (I) relates itself to Body, senses etc. and feels that I am this or that or this is mine, till then the sansara of joy and sorrow exists and this is due to the lack of discrimination between Self (Atman) and non-Self (Anatman). Thus the sansara is due to a false

superimposition of Consciousness on the insentient body and vice versa. For instance, if a good friend and companion leaves me and goes abroad, I become unhappy imagining how unhappy he would be by this separation. Actually the other person is not affected at all and after ten years he completely forgot me and could not even recollect. So the unhappiness I suffered was false. This sansara, in other words the iron grip of this world would never get loosened by itself as we will continue to be engaged in the thoughts of one or the other objects of this world[45]. It is the mind, which becomes the world and it is the mind, which is a bondage. The Self identifies itself with the mind and experiences bondage while enjoying the desired objects. At first the mind creates through imagination various qualities e.g., that the jalebi is sweet. Actually all the virtues and defects we see in an object are all subjective and we see them in our individualistic outlook. Thus due to the actions done, induced by the Vasanas (desires) the Jiva goes on wandering from birth to birth till the deluge. The cause behind Vasanas and actions is the nescience (avidya or

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45. मन एव हि संसारो बन्धश्चैव मनः शुभे।
आत्मा मनः समानत्वमेत्य तद्गतबन्धभाक्॥ (IV-3-21)

ignorance). Again at the time of creation, the previous vasanas along with the mind get revived, the Jiva takes birth and the previous course is repeated. When at last due to some special virtuous acts done[46], one gets the company of saints (satsanga) and my devotees, then slowly his mind begins to turn towards me. Then gradually he develops deep interest (sraddha) in hearing God's stories. Then, without any effort he comes to know his own nature as to who he is. By the grace of the Guru he comes to understand the real meaning of Mahavakyas of the scriptures and realises the Atman who is of the form of Satyam (Reality) and Ananda (Bliss). Contemplate on these truths told by me and ceasing to be affected by the series of sorrows, you will be released from the bondage of birth and death caused by actions. Remain contemplating on these spiritual truths and meditating on my form. You will not be tainted by any actions that come to your lot by Lord's will." On hearing these instructions of Ramachandra, Tara became not only freed from her sorrow but also became a Jivanmukta.

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46. यदा पुण्यविशेषेण लभते सङ्गतिं सताम्।
मद्भक्तानां सुशान्तानां तदा मद्विषया मतिः॥ (IV-3-28)

Rama and Lakshmana proceeded to a cave on the top of Pravarshana mountain, began to live there and spent the rainy days.

One day, Lakshmana requested Rama to teach him the method of "Kriya Marga" – i.e. external puja of God. Rama began his instructions:–

"As per Scriptures one should get endowed with the sacred thread (this is for the first three castes) and get initiated into a mantra by a Sadguru. He should do worship (pooja) in the manner indicated by the Guru with devotion and love. One should worship God in a statue, in the heart, in fire, in the sun or in a saligram stone. At the outset the seeker should get up in the morning and take bath for keeping the body clean. Chanting the Vedic mantras as prescribed one should do the Sandhya Vandanam (day-break prayers). For any karma, one has to do a sankalpa mentioning the purpose for which it is done. Then one should do pooja of his Guru considering him as God Himself. If the icon is made of stone or metal, it should be given a bath (snanam). The pooja is to be done with fragrant flowers. One should have the attitude of service and should never resort to cunning or deceit. If one worships fire one should pour

oblations (ahuti) and if it is Sun one should give Arghya (water offering). The Lord says that whatever is offered to me with love is acceptable– even if it is mere water. All the things like flowers, incense sticks and offerings of eatables should all be collected and kept well before starting the pooja to avoid getting up in the middle. One should secure a seat (asanam made up of cloth, deerskin or darbha grass) and sit before God (the statue or painting or photo). One should do Matruka Nyasa (OM AM NAMAH; OM AAM NAMAH etc.,) Then one should utter the 12 names of God – like Kesava, Narayana, Madhava, Govinda etc., Then the Nyasas in fingers (like Lam Prithivyātmane namah) e.g., nyasa of the five elements, Mantra Nysa, Murthi Nyasa etc., should be done. A Kalash (vessel with water) should be kept in front on the left side and flowers etc. on the right side. After sipping drops of water (achamanam) meditate in the heart on the Self, which is resplendent like the Sun, and by imagination draw that power of Paramatman from inside the body and install it on the idol. With various types of offerings like Pādya (water for washing feet), Arghya (water for washing hands) etc., the service to the Lord's idol (includes bathing, offering of garments etc.) should be done.

Camphor, kumkum (vermilon mark) and sandal paste should be offered and the Archana (pooja with 108 or 1008 names) is to be done with flowers. The pooja should be done with Vedic Mantras as prescribed in Kalpa (the scriptures containing the procedure). It should be ended with incense, waving of deepa (light), Arti and consecrations of food items (Naivedya). All should be done with faith and sincerity. Those who know Mantra Sastra well should do a small fire sacrifice (homa) in a fire pit constructed as per Agama Sastra and pour oblations with the main mantra or by recitation of Purusha Sookta (of the Vedas). Always one should think of Lord as sitting in the midst of the fire. Offer some food (Bali) to the associates of the Lord (Pārshada) and conclude the Homa. Do the japa of the main mantra thinking of the Lord in silence and offer pan (betel leaves) to the Lord. One can also offer dance and music, prayers etc., to the Lord and finally prostrate fully praying to the Lord to uplift from the frightening sansara. If a person does pooja like this everyday he will get mukti undoubtedly.

"The one who reads or hears this secret and holy narration directly from the Lord becomes entitled to all the fruits of the pooja itself."

As time passed on, being reminded by Hanuman of his own promise to help Rama in retrieving *Sita*, Sugriva ordered Hanuman to despatch ten thousand mighty monkeys in all directions to bring all the big monkeys within fifteen days and the monkeys which failed to abide to this time limit would be got executed.

In the meantime, Rama got restless that no steps had been taken by Sugriva to have Sita located and the latter had been enjoying with his wives forgetful of his promise to Rama. Lakshmana went to Sugriva at the behest of his brother with great rage but was pacified by Tara and Hanuman by showing the numerous monkeys which were all arriving at Kishkindha.

Sugriva accompanied Lakshmana to visit Rama. He introduced all the first line monkeys like, Nala, Neela, Mainda etc., as born of divine origin and also Jambavan, the king of bears. In the presence of Rama, he sent the various groups of monkeys to the various directions for searching Sita. Hanuman, Angada the crown prince, Jambavan, Nala, Sushena etc. were directed to go towards the South. Sugriva warned them all that they should

return within a month and if not they would be subjected to death sentence. Rama called Hanuman and handed over his signet ring with his name inscribed on it, to be given to Sita to attest the genuineness of his emissary. While wandering in search of Sita, as they got thirsty, the monkeys entered into a cave where they saw a water pond with clear water. They saw a lone lady, a yogini sitting on a throne and immersed in meditation. On seeing and after talking to them that lady permitted them to eat the fruits available there in plenty to their heart's content and to drink water. She then told her story to Hanuman. "I am the companion of Hema the daughter of Viswakarma (the divine architect and builder), to whom this place had been gifted by Lord Siva who was pleased with her dance. My name is Swayamprabha. My friend while going away to Brahmaloka advised me to stay here and to do penance (tapasya) to help the monkeys, the emissaries of Rama, the Supreme Lord, who will come here searching for Sita. Now that my mission is over, I am going to have darshan of Rama." She sent them all outside the Guha by means of her yogic powers and went away to meet Rama.

It was already more than one month and the group of monkeys with Hanuman and Angada did not so far meet with any success in tracing out Sita. They were by the side of the great ocean. They lay down on the shore having decided to end their lives by fasting. In the meantime, a big mountain of a vulture came out of a cave in the Mahendra Giri and made its way towards the monkeys congratulating himself in getting many monkeys which he could eat on a number of days at the rate of one per day. The monkeys also began to wail loudly about their mission having failed and regretted their inability to serve Rama. They praised Jatayu for the service he rendered to Rama at the cost of his own life. Sampathi the vulture was extremely happy to hear some news of his younger brother Jatayu after several thousand years. The monkeys and Sampathi began to exchange their stories upto the time of their meeting on the seashore. As Sampathi's wings had been seared and burnt off long back, he was taken by the monkeys to the ocean. Sampathi had a bath and gave some offering of water to his dead brother and was brought back to the original place. On being entreated by the monkeys as he was able to see a long distance including Lanka with the long range

sight of a vulture, he informed the monkeys "on the other side of the ocean, on the top of Trikuta mountain, Sita is kept in Ashokavana at Lanka and she is surrounded by rakshasis. I am able to see her. You will have to cross the ocean which extends to 100 yojanas, in order to see her. Now you people decide among yourselves as to who is capable of crossing the ocean, of talking to Sita and returning."

Sampathi also told the monkeys his own story as to how he came to have his wings burnt up. Once both Sampathi and Jatayu in their youth were highly proud of their prowess and immense physical strength. They wanted to test their own strength. Both tried to fly up to the solar orbit and flew thousands and thousands of kilometers. As they neared the Sun the heat was intolerable and Sampathi tried to protect Jatayu by spreading his own wings over him. He was burnt up badly and fell down unconscious on the earth and remained so for three days. After coming to his senses he dragged himself to a nearby Ashram and narrated his tale of woe to a Rishi called Chandrama. He wanted to commit suicide as it would be difficult for a vulture to live without its wings.

The sage began to give him a few words of advice based on spiritual truths:-

"All sorrows stem from the body-mind complex. The body again owes its birth to the actions (karma) done. The actions are motivated by the ego i.e. considering oneself to be the body. The ego has no beginning and is caused by avidya (ignorance) and is itself insentient. It is just like when an iron ball is heated in a furnace, heat pervades the entire body of the ball. The ego flourishes in the reflection of Pure Consciousness. Due to its identification with the body, the latter looks as if it is conscious. The ego that "I am the body" is responsible for the entire sansara which is made up of joys and sorrows. Even though the Self is changeless, on account of the false identification with the body that 'I am the body' the entire sansara of joy and sorrow, birth and death etc. begins to flow. Due to the false identification one considers oneself as the doer of actions, does all actions (good and bad) and gets bound by the fruits of actions - sin and merit (papa and punya). The Jiva goes up and down (heaven and hell) to experience the punya and papa earned. He thinks that as he has done virtuous deeds like

giving in charity (dana), yagas etc., he will go to heaven and enjoy. Actually after enjoying in the heaven he has to fall down when the stock of punya has been exhausted. He falls down and co-exists in the grains and vegetables. When the grains etc. are consumed by man, it is transformed into semen and when it pervades the yoni of a woman in the intercourse it becomes a fluid embryo in the womb of that woman and gets covered by the placenta. On the 7th night it becomes a small ball of flesh and in two months, blood, a sprout, neck, head, shoulders, stomach etc. are formed. In the fifth month, the consciousness enters into the foetus. Then it is able to remember its past karmas and past births too. It regrets that it had been engaged in looking after the family, earning money by all means - straight and crooked and had never thought of God even in dreams. "Because of this I am experiencing the fruit of past actions in being confined to this womb and suffering there. This womb is just like hell. When shall I get out of this? In future I shall daily worship Vishnu." Consider yourself as the Self beyond the Prakriti and leave off your 'mineness' (sense of possessions) of the body. When once the delusion born of ignorance is lost one does not bother whether the body falls

or continue to remain as a result of the karmas. A yogi does not feel joy or sorrow resulting from ignorance. So continue with this disabled body of yours till your prarabdha karmas are exhausted. Further you have a mission. Sometime in future Rama's emissaries, some monkeys will come here in search of Sita. You have to help them with your information."

Now the monkeys debated among themselves as to who was fit to cross the ocean and deliver Rama's message to Sita. Angada claimed that while he could cross the ocean once and go to Lanka, he could not return. Nobody was able to cross the full length of the ocean and return. Jambavan incited the self-confidence of Hanuman as he had immeasurable strength and persuaded him to cross the ocean on Rama's service. All the monkeys bade farewell to Hanuman and the latter went up and stood at the peak of the Mahendra Mountain in order to fly across the ocean.

Let us now recollect as to what types of essential sadhanas have been mentioned in the last two KĀNDĀs namely Aranya and Kishkindha:

1. Remembrance of God constantly is the key to liberation. This can be done by taking

any of the God's names unceasingly, by resorting to Satsanga and Mantra japa. Love of God (Bhakti) and faith are essential.

2. It is not an exaggeration to say that by worshipping an idol or a form of Rama, Krishna or any other God in our mind if we reach the level of a *Savikalpa Samadhi*, we will be subsequently, willingly or unwillingly, taken to the highest formless Reality. We do not worship the icons but we actually pray to the Supreme Consciousness behind the idol, which is only a doorway that grants a glimpse of our Self, which pervades all the objects of the world.

3. An equal vision towards all irrespective of the status, station in life etc., indifference to both censure and pain and detachment towards near and dear ones and other possessions are all essentially to be cultivated as they are all aids to Jnana.

4. One should repeatedly contemplate that we are not the body but we are the pure Atman, which is impervious to any happen-

ing in life. We are not an individual power but are an integral part of the Totality. So we are not doers of any action.

5. Effort to meditate on God ceaselessly and Grace of God are both complementary.

6. Vairagya or detachment will automatically result when the intensity of bhakti remains firm.

7. As even attitudes of hatred and deep enmity towards God kept one constantly remembering God, even rakshasas with such attitude (like Ravana) got mukti ultimately. One should keep oneself related to God constantly by any means whatsoever.

8. If only one remembers God at the last moment of his life irrespective of whether he has been a sinner all through his life, moksha is eventually assured for him. But this requires either constant practice of remembrance all through this life or it is a result of excellent actions like keeping company of realised saints etc. in past birth.

9. One should avoid having any reaction to events which result in sorrow. Both joy and sorrow are only due to mental conditioning and there is nothing real about it.

Again and again, the entire Adhyatma Ramayanam lays repeated emphasis on seeking the company of holy men and saints (satsang) and cultivating deep love and devotion to God and on constant remembrance of God.

KISHKINDHA KĀNDA COMPLETED

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Part-V

SUNDARA KĀNDA

The title of this KĀNDA is to denote that this part mainly deals with the exploits of Hanuman whose original name was 'Sundara' kept as a secret by his parents.

Hanuman prayed to Rama and jumped into the air towards the southern direction and flew. As the gods wanted to test the prowess and intelligence of Hanuman, they sent Surasa (the mother of serpents) who went and blocked Hanuman's way. As she was full of hunger, she opened her mouth wide and invited Hanuman to enter into it to enable her to gobble him, in spite of Hanuman's pleadings to spare him and his promise to return to her after completing Rama's work. Hanuman went on increasing his size and Surasa too went on making her mouth wider and wider extending for several kilometers. Suddenly, in a flash, Hanuman entered into her mouth making himself thumb-sized and came out, thus fulfilling her invitation to enter into it. Surasa was pleased with this exhibition of his intelligence and wished him success in his mission.

After Hanuman had gone some distance, he found himself being forcibly drawn towards a rakshasi called Sinhika living in the midst of the ocean and who was able to pull people towards her by catching hold of and drawing their shadows, in order to eat them. He just hit at her with his feet, and flew away and reached Lanka at the top of Trikuta mountain. He made his form very tiny and entered through the main gates of Lanka at night. The goddess presiding over Lanka (Lankini), who was in the guise of a demoness sighted Hanuman and challenged him. Hanuman hit her with his left elbow and the goddess fell down vomiting blood. Lankini allowed Hanuman to go in as she recognized that it was the beginning of the end of Ravana's glory. As directed by her, Hanuman went straight to Ashokavanam in the harem complex in his minute form. He saw Sita sitting underneath a Simsupa tree - lean and thin due to fasting, chanting Rama's name in utter grief.

While hiding under the cover of a tree foliage, Hanuman saw Ravana coming to Sita along with a bevy of women. Ravana tried to persuade Sita to opt for him as Rama had no love for her and decried Rama in many words. On hearing a spirited

scornful reply from Sita he went away after giving an ultimatum that if within two months Sita refuses to come under his control voluntarily, he will be forced to make a breakfast of her. He ordered the rakshasi attendants to ensure that Sita would comply with the desire of Ravana to enjoy her, by applying threats or by treating her sweetly. When the rakshasis began to threaten Sita, one among them named Trijata warned the rakshasis that she had just dreamt that Rama killed Ravavna and after making Vibhishana the king of Lanka went back with Sita. Sita got so frightened by the threats that while debating within herself the possibility of committing suicide by strangling her neck with her hair, began to weep loudly. Hanuman, in his tiny form, began to sing the entire history of Rama, his birth, marriage, banishment, loss of Sita etc. and finally about Hanuman's coming as a messenger and now looking at Sita. Sita was wonderstruck and could not believe her ears till Hanuman came and prostrated before her. As Sita became suspicious that this could be a trick played by Ravana in the guise of a monkey, Hanuman narrated in detail the meeting of Sugriva with Rama and the subsequent events and also handed over the signet ring of Rama as a proof of his bonafides. Now Sita was

extremely happy and requested Hanuman to convey her message – "Please tell Rama the pitiable state in which I am, as personally witnessed by you. If Rama does not come here to rescue me within a period of two months, Ravana shall certainly eat me." Sita also handed over her own crest jewel (Choodamani) to him and as further proof told him a secret episode from her own life known to nobody else except herself and Rama. The episode related to Indra's son coming as a crow and biting her toe and Rama's compassion in not killing it but taking away one eye of the crow through his arrow.

Hanuman then took Sita's permission to eat some fruits from the trees all around, as he was hungry. Hanuman wanted also to create a situation in which he could talk to Ravana personally before returning to Rama. Leaving the portion occupied by Sita, Hanuman pulled out all the trees and threw them away so that the Ashokavanam became devastated and empty in no moment. The rakshasas ran away to Ravana and informed him of the destruction caused by a mighty monkey. In a fight which ensued, Hanuman killed all the servants, sons of ministers, the five commanders of the Army and at last Akshakumara, one of Ravana's sons in

no time. Indrajit the foremost among Ravana's sons went along with a number of rakshasa soldiers to Ashokavanam and he sent the Brahmastra (the ultimate in Divinised weapons) against Hanuman. Hanuman respected that astra and allowed himself to be bound by the astra and by ropes too. Actually the invisible Brahmastra bound him only for a second and then released him. Hanuman was only posing as if he was bound. On being questioned by Ravana, Hanuman revealed his identity and his purpose in coming to Lanka. He also advised Ravana:-

"You have been born to Visrava, a grandson of Brahma and from the point of view of body you are not a demon. You are the changeless Self. This body, intellect etc. and the chain of miseries which come out of them do not belong to you and nor do you belong to them. They are all false like the objects in a dream. If one goes on considering oneself as "I am the pure Consciousness, I am the unborn, indestructible Brahman. I am the Bliss" one is always liberated from conditioning free from any blemishes. Just by enquiring as to 'Who am I' you will be liberated from the imaginary bondage.

The best aid to get moksha[47] once for all is devotion and love towards Lord Hari which leads to pure knowledge. Leave off your enmity, go and hand over Sita and take refuge in Rama. Otherwise you will be overtaken by calamities."

Ravana wanted to kill Hanuman for his impertinence but Vibhishana prevented him as under the scriptures, a messenger from another king is bestowed with international diplomatic immunity. On orders from Ravana, the rakshasas wound a number of cloth pieces dipped in oil over the tail of Hanuman and set fire to it. Hanuman was taken in procession when he suddenly released himself from the ropes, and jumped over a tower after assuming a large body like a mountain and began climbing from mansion to mansion and house to house in Lanka setting fire to them all with his burning tail. The entire Lanka was burnt to ashes, except the house of Vibhishana. The fire restrained itself from scorching and burning Hanuman's tail on account of Sita's prayers to that effect. Then

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47. (अ)निरञ्जनो मुक्त उपाधितः सदा ज्ञात्वैवमात्मानमितो विमुच्यते।
अतोऽहमात्यन्तिकमोक्षसाधनं वक्ष्ये शृणुष्वावहितो महामते॥
(V-4-21 & 22)
(आ)विष्णोर्हि भक्तिः सुविशोधनं धियस्ततो भवेज्ज्ञानमतीव निर्मलम्।

Hanuman went to the ocean and extinguished the fire in his tail by dipping it in the waters of the ocean. He went to Sita and took leave of her. He returned to the group of his monkey companions waiting for him on the opposite shore and informed them of his exploits in Lanka. When all the monkeys were returning to Kishkindha, they saw on the way a beautiful garden called Madhuvanam full of fruit-bearing trees and a collection of nice honey all under the direct control of Sugriva. With the permission of Angada, all the monkeys who were famished with hunger ate a lot of those fruits and drank honey to their heart's content. They all went and prostrated to Rama in the presence of Sugriva and informed them in detail as to how Sita was located and Hanuman was able to converse with her and handed over the crest jewel of Sita along with the message. Rama was extremely happy and embraced Hanuman saying that he could never re-compense him for the excellent help rendered by him. He assured Hanuman that he was his most beloved devotee.

SUNDARA KĀNDA COMPLETED

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Part-VI

YUDDHA KĀNDA

Hanuman told Rama about the system and the deployment of the army etc. inside Lanka. The entire army of monkeys led by Sugriva, Rama and Lakshmana started towards Lanka. Rama and Lakshmana were carried by Hanuman on his shoulders. They all reached the seashore. Rama was inconsolable in his grief when he again and again remembered Sita, even though he was the Supreme Lord[48] himself full of permanent bliss and bereft of all attachment. Having come into association with the characteristics of maya, Rama looked as if he was full of sorrows as seen from the point of view of the ignorant people.

At Lanka, Ravana had a conference with his ministers and courtiers. His brother Kumbhakarna advised him:-"Rama is Lord Vishnu himself and is indestructible. Sita is Lakshmi herself. In your ignorance you have done an imprudent act in abducting her. The work you have started will end

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48. रामः परात्मा पुरुषः पुराणो नित्योदितो नित्यसुखो निरीहः।
तथाऽपि मायागुण सङ्गतोऽसौ सुखीव दुःखीव विभाव्यतेऽबुधैः॥
(VI-I-54)

in your own destruction. If only Rama comes to see you, it will not be possible for you to remain alive. So if you heed my words, I shall set right the entire matter." Indrajit intervened and told his father that he alone will be able to kill Rama, Lakshmana and all his associates. In the meantime, Vibhishana, a great devotee of the Lord advised his brother Ravana to return Sita to Rama as otherwise the entire Lanka and all the rakshasas would perish. Ravana abused Vibhishana for his ungratefulness and lack of loyalty to himself. Vibhishana climbed up along with his four ministers and standing in the sky gave the parting advice again:–

"Oh Ravana, you are abusing me, your best well wisher and are intent on rushing towards your destruction.

"Rama is time (Kala) in the form of death. Sita is his escort who is Kali. Rama is the Supreme Lord who is residing inside and outside of all. When he manifests with name and form, because of the differences in the form as seen from eyes of the ignorant we are unable to understand how it is that one Lord looks as different objects and beings due to the qualities of the maya. Rama is an Avatar whose main purpose is only to kill you. Lord's will

is supreme and it cannot be otherwise. I do not want to see you dying in the battlefield along with the entire race of rakshasas, your sons and relatives. So I am leaving you and shall go to Rama for serving him."

Vibhishana came to Rama and informed him of how Ravana refused to heed to his advice. He sought refuge in Rama by surrendering himself to Rama's feet desirous of release from the sansara. In spite of Sugriva's protest to the contrary, Rama accepted Vibhishana saying that "Whosoever[49] surrenders himself to me pleading 'I am yours', I vouchsafe full protection from all other beings. This is my motto." Here Vyasa repeats the very wordings of Rama as in Valmiki Ramayanam. On being prodded by Rama, Vibhishana asked for one boon – "Please grant me your jnana (knowledge) conditioned by bhakti, meditation on your reality and love and devotion to your feet." Rama blessed him and got him coronated on the spot as the king of Lanka.

Rama became unhappy that the deity presiding over the ocean had not come to greet him and had

49. सकृदेव प्रपन्नाय तवास्मीति च याचते।
अभयं सर्वभूतेभ्यो ददाम्येतद्व्रतं मम॥ (VI-3-12)

the temerity to disregard the Lord who is disguised as a man. Rama took out his arrow and declared that he was going to reduce to ashes the entire ocean. The deity of the ocean became terribly afraid, came out assuming a divine and resplendent form and fell down at the feet of Lord Rama pleading for mercy and promising to give him way for going to Lanka. He also suggested to Rama that he might get a bridge constructed through Nala, the son of the Divine Architect Vishvakarma. Before starting the construction of the bridge, Rama installed a Sivalinga (Rameswaram) and worshipped Him for the welfare of the entire world. The one who prostrates to the Setubandha bridge after having darshan of Rameswara Siva will be released even from the worst of sins, by Rama's grace. The one who goes to Kasi (Varanasi) brings the Ganga water, pours it over Rameswara Siva and throws the vessel (in which water was brought) into the sea, will without doubt attain Brahman. Within a few days the bridge was got built by the monkeys by throwing big mountains and rocks into the sea.

A spy, Suka, sent by Ravana in order to assess the might of Rama's army came back and advised Ravana not to become the enemy of Rama but to

hand over Sita to him. He was driven away from the presence of Ravana. Ravana's grandfather (mother's father) Malyavan came to Ravana and gave him good advice to return Sita to Rama. Ravana ignored him.

All the monkeys climbed up the hill and surrounded Lanka with trees (uprooted) and rocks in their hands. All the rakshasas also came out of all the gates of Lanka in great numerical strength and a big blood-curdling fight ensued. A number of monkeys as well as rakshasas died in the war. Hanuman brought the mountain called Dronagiri by uprooting it.

With the help of the herbs in that mountain all the dead monkeys got revived. As Rama infused his own divine strength into all the monkeys, the latter fought with great valour[50]. Though Rama was the controller of all and He himself was in all the forms, he was playing the role of a (illusory) man and though being the Supreme Lord was playing the sport of a war. This was maya.

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50. सर्वेश्वरः सर्वमयो विधाता मायामनुष्यत्व-विडम्बनेन।
सदा चिदानन्दमयोऽपि रामो युद्धादिलीलां वितनोति मायाम्॥
(VI-5-86)

On seeing that many of his warriors had been killed, Ravana personally went to the battlefield fully equipped with all weapons in his divine chariot. He killed a number of monkeys. On seeing Vibhishana, his own brother Ravana sent an infallible weapon called Sakti against him. As Lakshmana thought it was his duty to save Vibhishana whom Rama had undertaken to protect, he went and stood in front of Vibhishana covering the latter. Lakshmana being hit by Sakti fell down unconscious on the ground. When Ravana wanted to take Lakshmana's body with him, he found himself unable to lift him off the ground. In the meantime, Hanuman came and boxed Ravana who fell down. Hanuman took away Lakshmana's body to Rama. The Sakti weapon also left its grip on Lakshmana and went back to Ravana's chariot.

When Ravana came to his senses, he again went to Rama who was carried by Hanuman on his shoulders and fought with him. Rama, with his arrows, cut asunder Ravana's chariot, horses, charioteer, his weapons, his bow etc. and wounded Ravana with an arrow. Ravana fell down, his bow having slipped down from his hand. Rama took pity on Ravana and advised him to go home and come back next day to witness his own prowess.

Rama was overtaken by grief to see Lakshmana lying unconscious on account of the impact of Sakti weapon. He despatched Hanuman post-haste to bring the specific herbs from Dronagiri as on earlier occasions. When treated with the herbs of Dronagiri, Lakshmana got up again.

Ravana ordered that Kumbhakarna who was always sleeping should be awakened and brought before him. Kumbahkarna came before Ravana and laughed at him. He said: – "Long ago I had advised you but you ignored my words. Now you are experiencing the bitter consequences of your sinful action. Narada himself had told me that it is Lord Vishnu who is born as Rama, with the express purpose of killing you because, as per the boon from Brahma, you can be killed by a man only.

Leave off your enmity and take refuge in Rama. Rama showers his grace on anybody approaching with devotion.[51] Bhakti only generates Jnana (knowledge) and bestows Moksha. Whatever is done without devotion is a waste. Bhagavan has taken several incarnations (avataras) and Rama's

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51. भक्तिर्जनित्री ज्ञानस्य भक्तिर्मोक्षप्रदायिनी।
भक्तिहीनेन यत्किञ्चित्कृतं सर्वमसत्समम्॥ (VI-7-67)

avatara[52] alone is equal to one thousand avataras. Rama is verily the Supreme awareness and he is Siva. The wise people who worship Rama both mentally and by words constantly will reach the holy feet of Lord Hari, having crossed sansara without effort." As Ravana was enraged by this advice, Kumbhakarna went to the battlefield. He went on swallowing all the monkeys on the way. Vibhishana who saw his elder brother prostrated to him. Kumbhakarna embraced him and advised him to get out of his way as he himself was unable to distinguish who were his own and who were the enemies, as he was in a highly intoxicated state. Rama cut off his hands and feet and had to split his body into several pieces with a number of arrows. Kumbhakarna's dead body flew up to the main gate of Lanka and blocked the entrance.

Narada came to have a darshan of Rama and standing in the sky began to praise him:–

"I bow to you, Oh Lord Narayana, the substratum of the entire universe. You abide in the hearts of all but are hidden by maya. As you are

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52. अवतारा: सुबहवो विष्णोर्लीलानुकारिण:।
तेषां सहस्रसदृशो रामो ज्ञानमय: शिव: (VI-7-68)

self-effulgent, you reveal yourself only to those whose minds are pure. You are both Prakriti and Purusha (the Primordial nature and the Supreme Being). The Vedas declare that all creation is Pure Consciousness as also that the Supreme Lord is also Pure Consciousness. But the Lord Himself has taken the form of the world. It is only through your Grace that one can understand these statements. The entire phenomenal world is imagined due to misapprehension, beyond the range of apprehension of the mind. The entire world is imagined in you. The greatest form of yours is unconditioned. As your attributeless transcendental form is beyond the reach of the mind how can you ever become an object? If you cannot become an[53] object of sight how can one worship you ? That is why wise people have managed to cross the ocean of sansara by worshipping forms of your avataras.

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53. मनसोऽविषयो देव रूपं ते निर्गुणं परम्॥ (VI-8-43)
कथं दृश्यं भवेद्देव दृश्याभावे भजेत्कथम्।
अतस्त्वावतारेषु रूपाणि निपुणा भुवि॥ (तख-8-44)
भचन्ति बुद्धिसम्पन्नास्तरन्त्येव भवार्णवम्। (तख-8-45)

For those persons who associate with your devotees, who constantly remember[54] your form also in the mind, who are engaged in your worship and hearing your glorious stories, it becomes very easy to cross sansara. That is why I wander[55] always meditating on your form with all attributes (Saguna) even after having been liberated and honoured by all gods. Please bless me." Then Narada went away to Brahmaloka.

Indrajit consoled Ravana who was anguished at the death of his brother and proceeded towards Nikumbila, a place where he intended to perform a fire sacrifice which would render him invincible by gods or men. Vibhishana cautioned Rama about this and added that as per a boon granted by Brahma to Indrajit, he could not be killed except by a person who had lived for twelve years without sleep and food. As Lakshmana had remained without food and sleep in the previous twelve years

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54. त्वन्नाम स्मरतां नित्यं त्वद्रूपमपि मानसे। (VI-8-46)
त्वत्पूजानिरतानां ते कथामृतपरात्मनाम्।
त्वद्भक्तसंगिनां राम संसारो गोष्पदायते॥ (तख-8-47)

55. अतस्ते सगुणं रूपं ध्यात्वाहं सर्वदा हृदि।
मुक्तश्चरामि लोकेषु पूज्योऽहं सर्वदेवतैः॥ (VI-8-48)

while serving Rama and Sita in the forest, he was commanded by Rama to go and kill Indrajit before he could complete the sacrifice (Havanam). Lakshmana went to Nikumbila with all the monkeys, Hanuman and Vibhishana. As Indrajit was surrounded by a heavy guard of soldiers, a terrific battle took place. When all the rakshasa soldiers were quickly killed, Indrajit was forced to abandon the sacrifice midway and came on a chariot fully armed. After an equal show of valour from both sides, finally Lakshmana took up AINDRA ASTRA (an arrow invoking Indra's personal presence) and prayed[56] to Rama - "If it is a fact that Rama is virtuous, always dedicated to truth and unequalled in all the three worlds, may this arrow kill Indrajit." The arrow cut off the head of Indrajit and threw it on the ground.

Ravana was inconsolable in his grief. In his anger he drew his sword and went to Sita in order to cut off her head but was prevented by one of his intelligent ministers.

When Ravana found that he would not be able to stand up before Rama, he went to Sukracharya, the

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56. धर्मात्मा सत्यसंधश्च रामो दाशरथिर्यदि।
त्रिलोक्यामप्रतिद्वंद्वस्तदेनं जहि रावणिम्॥ (VI-9-45)

great Guru of all demons and sought his advice. Sukracharya gave him a Mantra and bade him do a Homa (Sacrifice) with that Mantra. If only Ravana could finish the Homa without any obstruction, he would get a chariot with horses and a Divine bow with arrows, which will render him unconquerable. Ravana constructed a secret cave in his own residence and after shutting all the doors and entrances into Lanka, he began to perform the Homa. Vibhishana who sighted the big smoke coming out of the palace building, guessed its origin and informed Rama. As ordered by Rama, all the army of monkeys led by Sugriva, Angada and Hanuman climbed up to Ravana's residence and pulverised all the soldiers guarding the building. Sarama, Vibhishana's wife, indicated with a sign of her finger the exact location of the cave where the havan was taking place. Angada and other monkeys entered into the cave and tried to shake Ravana who was continuing with his havan with unswerving attention. They bit him with teeth, kicked him, beat him with wooden sticks but Ravana remained unshaken. Angada went into the harem where Ravana's wives were there and dragged Mandodari the queen of Ravana by her hair weeping before Ravana and tore off her upper garments. Some

other semi-divine nymphs brought and kept by Ravana were dragged to Ravana's presence. Mandodari began to cry pitiably and began to admonish Ravana for his shameful indifference when his own wife was being grossly insulted. She asked Ravana – "Are you not ashamed that you go on offering oblations to the fire while the modesty of your own' wife is being assaulted in your very presence. Fie on you who should rather die immediately when you are unable to protect your own wife." At last, Ravana was forced to get up and taking his sword he hit Angada below his hip. As they have disrupted the havan, the monkeys returned to Rama with full satisfaction. When Mandodari begged him to return Sita to Rama at least at this stage. Ravana told her:– "Beloved, I knew pretty well that Rama is Lord Narayana Himself and Sita is Lakshmi. Knowingly, deliberately, Sita was kidnapped by me. I shall fight with Rama, get killed by his hands and attain moksha which is not easy to get by all."

Ravana went on his chariot fully equipped with all types of weapons, to the battlefield. A big fight ensued between Ravana and Rama. Indra sent his own chariot and Matali, his driver, to serve Rama who was fighting standing on the ground. There

were showers of arrows from both sides. At one stage, Rama cut off the heads of Ravana one hundred and one times but as many times as he cut them, Ravana's heads came back and joined his neck and Ravana went on fighting. Then Vibhishana revealed to Rama the secret that this was due to a boon from Brahma and he had a ball of Amrita (nectar) in his navel, which should be first got dried up by Agneya Astra before cutting off his head. Rama followed his advice, first broke the navel and then cut off all the heads of Ravana except one and his shoulders. On the advice of Matali, Rama aimed Brahmastra (the ultimate in divine weapons) at Ravana's heart after invoking the power by chanting the prescribed Mantras. At last Ravana fell down dead. All the gods and demi-gods who were witnessing the fight from the sky applauded Rama's act and became very happy. A divine light which came out of the body of Ravana and was shining like the Sun, entered into Rama. When all the gods were surprised at this event, Narada explained, "Ravana, because of his hatred for Rama was thinking of him night and day with fear and seeing Rama in his dreams too. The hatred in Ravana served him more than what any instruction from a Guru can do. So Ravana has attained Sayujya Moksha.

"However much one may be a sinner[57], scoundrel or one given to adultery, when once such a person dies after having been always thinking of Rama with love or fear, he is cleansed of sins accrued in hundreds of births and with a heart purified reaches Vaikuntha, the Lord's abode."

Rama declared before all that in future people will be reciting everywhere this story leading to Ravana's death, which will purify all the three worlds.

All the ladies led by Mandodari fell near Ravana's body and went on weeping inconsolably. Vibhishana was also overwhelmed with intense grief. Lakshmana began to console them with the wisdom of the philosophy:-

"Tell me, Vibhishana, what is Ravana to you? All the relationships are only attitudes of the mind and are all super-imposed. You just imagine that he is your brother and weep. Just as different particles of the sand join together at one place due

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57. पापिष्ठो वा दुरात्मा परधनपरदारेषु सक्तो यदि स्या-
न्नित्यं स्नेहाद्भयाद्वा रघुकुलतिलकं भावयन्संपरेतः।
भूत्वा शुद्धान्तरङ्गो भवशतजनितानेकदोषैर्विमुक्तः।
सद्यो रामस्य विष्णोः सुरवरविनुतं याति वैकुण्ठमाद्यम्॥ (VI-11-87)

to the flowing water current and then get separated, in the same way we meet people and get separated too.

"The time and the instrument or the means of death are all pre-determined. It is the Lord who creates Jivas and destroys them, like a child, although he has no motive.

"Considering the Self as different from the body is also due to lack of discrimination. Multiplicity, birth, death, deterioration and accretion etc., appear as if they are the characteristics of the Self while they have nothing to do with it. The false apprehension is due to the identification of the body with the Atman due to misapprehension. The sorrow is purely of the mind and due to a delusion. So leave off all the relationships with the outside objects by finding faults in them and slowly attach the mind to Bhagawan Rama who is the Self of all beings, enacting the role of a man by means of His maya."[58]

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58. रामभद्रे भगवति मनो धेह्यात्मनीश्वरे। (VI-12-20)
सर्वभूतात्मनि परे मायामानुषरूपिणि।
बाह्येन्द्रियार्थ-सम्बन्धान्त्याजयित्वा मनः शनैः॥ (VI-12-21)
तत्र दोषान्दर्शयित्वा रामानन्दे नियोजय। (VI-12-22)

Vibhishana was made to attend the final rites of Ravana as he was unwilling by telling him that enmity lasts only till the death of the enemy and not subsequently too. Vibhishana was coronated formally and was bathed in the seawater brought in golden vessels. Sita was then brought by Vibhishana, after being given a bath and bejewelled with ornaments, Rama then decided to exchange the present Maya Sita for the real Sita given to the custody of the Fire lord. He told such bitter words to Sita that she ordered a fire to be kindled immediately. She said – "If it is true that my heart had never moved away from Ramachandra, may this fire which is a witness for the entire world protect me" and entered into the fire fearlessely. At that time Brhama, Indra, Varuna, Yama, Lord Siva etc. all came to Rama and sang songs of praise. The Fire God came in person carrying the real Sita and requested him to accept her. Dasaratha himself came there from the heaven, applauded Rama and went away. At the behest of Rama, Indra (king of Gods) revived all the monkeys who died in the battle by pouring Ambrosia (Amrit) over their bodies.

The stutis (songs of praise) by Brhama and Indra (in Chpter 13) are full of beautiful descriptions in a very attractive style of language and are worth getting by heart.

Rama and his entire retinue along with Vibhishana and Sugriva accompanied by the entire army got into Pushpaka Vimanam (an aerial vehicle of divine quality) which originally belonged to Kubera and started towards Ayodhya. They got down at Bharadwaja's ashram on the way, in order to pay their respects to that Maharshi. It was the last day of the 14 years of forest life ordained for Rama. Bharadwaja insisted on Rama's spending a night with him. Remembering Bharata's vow to immolate himself if Rama delayed his coming beyond the period of fourteen years, Rama despatched Hanuman with the message of his imminent arrival to Bharata. Bharata was over-joyed on getting that message at Nandigram. Bharata carrying Rama's sandals on his head and along with Satrughna followed by the Royal entourage of the Queen mothers in palanquins, went by foot to welcome Rama. On Rama's getting down from the Vimana there were mutual greetings and exchange of courtesies between both sides.

Hanuman etc., were despatched to various directions to bring the water from the four oceans for the abhisheka (ritualistic bathing necessary for the coronation) of Rama. The chief family priest Vasishtha seated Rama along with Sita on a raised platform studded with diamonds. All the great maharshis like Vasishtha, Valmiki, Vamadeva, Gautama etc. performed the abhisheka of Rama with the water scented with Tulsi leaves and impregnated with the essence of herbs while all the brhamins, priests, ministers, various gods standing in the sky etc. were showering praises on Rama.

Lord Siva himself instinctively praised Rama :- "I bow to[59] Rama along with Sita, who is dark in colour like the blue lilies, decked with various ornaments, crown, necklace etc. and supremely shining in the throne." He sang this and a few more.

During the celebrations, huge quantities or numbers of ornaments, clothes, horses, cows, gold etc. were got freely distributed to the Vedic Brahmins. Rama gave a priceless necklace to Sita who passed it on with his consent to Hanuman.

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59. नमोऽस्तु रामाय सशक्तिकाय नीलोत्पल-श्यामल-कोमलाय।
किरीटहाराङ्गदभूषणाय सिंहासनस्थाय महाप्रभाय॥ (VI-15-51)

On being persuaded by Rama, Hanuman asked a boon as follows:-

"My mind is never satisfied even though I go on chanting the name of Rama constantly. Please grant me that I continue to remain in this world chanting Ramnam ceaselessly as long as your name remains in the world" Rama readily granted the boon and bestowed Sayujya Mukti also at the end of the kalpa (total of 4 yugas). Vibhishana and Sugriva went back to their respective cities along with their retinue carrying a lot of gifts presented by Rama. Lakshmana was declared yuvaraja (crown prince).

In the Rama Rajya, no young people died when their elders were alive. All the people were thinking of Rama and engaged in his worship. The clouds rained at the proper time. All people observed Dharmas (Laws of the virtuous path) scrupulously. Rama ruled over his kingdom for ten thousand years.

This story of Rama[60] has been kept as a secret. It will bestow one with wealth and prosperity, long

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60. इदं रहस्यं धनधान्यऋद्धिमद्दीर्घायुरारोग्यकरं सुपुण्यदम्।
पवित्रमाध्यात्मिकसंज्ञितं पुरा रामायणं भाषितमादिशम्भुना॥
(VI-16-35)

life, good health and all Punyas (merits). This Adhyatma Ramayanam was narrated by Lord Siva. One who reads it gets all one's desires fulfilled and is cleansed of crores of sins committed. One begets a good son. The one who reads with faith will be able to conquer anger and jealousy. He becomes fearless and full of devotion and happiness.

Rama Himself is the Supreme[61] Brahman. This Adhyatma Ramayanam is an ancient epic, full of vairagya and the ultimate truth and the story is amazing. Whoever reads or hears will never have a rebirth.

YUDDHA KĀNDA COMPLETED

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61. अध्यात्मरामायणमेतदद्भुतं वैराग्यविज्ञानयुतं पुरातनम्।
पठन्ति शृण्वन्ति लिखन्ति ये नरास्तेषां भवेस्मिन्न पुनर्भवो भवेत्॥
(VI-16-48)

Part-VII

UTTARA KĀNDA

From the way Yuddha Kānda has been ended with a Phala-sruti (narration of the fruits of reading the book) for the Ramayana as a whole in many stanzas, it looks to the author of this book that ADHYATMA RAMAYANAM ends with that Kānda. Uttara Kānda was perhaps a subsequent addition. Uttara Kānda also has a Phala-sruti for the entire Ramayana but it differs in quality and quantity.

One of the greatest dissertations on the Vedanta i.e. on the relationship between God, Jiva and the World, renowned as Rama Gita, is found in Uttara Kānda and this Kānda deserves to be read for this alone.

Parvati asked Lord Siva as to what further leela Rama did after his coronation at Ayodhya, for how many years he lived on this earth and how he left this world finally. Siva began to narrate:

One day Agastya came along with many other Rishis in order to have a darshan of Rama. At the behest of the latter, he narrated the entire history viz., the birth and getting boons etc., of Rama and also of Sugriva and Vali. The Rishis returned to their abodes.

One day Sita informed Rama about a secret delegation from the gods of the heaven with a request for the return of Sita and Rama to Vaikuntha very early. Rama who had already been aware of the matter stated:

"To enable us to reach Vaikuntha I have thought of a plan. On the pretext of a bad name accruing to me among the people I shall banish you to the forest where you will give birth to two boys while in Valmiki ashram. Then you will come back and immediately go back to Vaikuntha after having been absorbed by the Mother Earth. I shall follow you later."

A few days later, at the insistence of Rama to know what was the people's opinion about himself, from Vijaya the state jester, Vijaya said, "The people look at askance at your improper action in bringing Sita back and continuing to live with her even though her character had been sullied by her long stay at Ravana's residence. They consider it an inexcusable transgression of moral law and a bad example to the subjects of a king." At the bidding of Rama, the very next day Lakshmana took Sita to the forest and left her in the vicinity

of the ashram of Valmiki. Sita began to weep in grief. Valmiki who could look into the future, kept Sita in his asram. Ramachandra, bereft of Sita, began to live a life of an ascetic mostly in silence leaving off all indulgence in various enjoyments.

RAMA GITA

Once when Rama was sitting alone Lakshmana approached him and with all humility and devotion requested him:

"Oh Rama, you are the Pure Consciousness, a witness, formless and the indwelling soul in all beings. I surrender myself at your feet. Please instruct me so that I shall be enabled to cross the boundless ocean of ignorance with the greatest ease."

Rama began to instruct him on the experiential knowledge (Vijnana) determined from the meaning of the scriptures:

"At first you should cleanse your heart by observing all the duties as prescribed for each caste and each station of life (householder, celibate etc.). One should then approach a Sadguru.

Actions are the cause of our getting a body. When we accept the body as 'I' and 'mine', then we like certain objects and dislike certain others. This leads to desire and hate (raga dvesha) from which spring sin and merit (papa and punya). They in turn lead to rebirth and thus a cycle of birth, death and rebirth goes on like a wheel – the prime cause for all this being 'ignorance'. The means of removing this ignorance is called 'Vidya'. The yoga of action (karma) which is done out of ignorance cannot drive away ignorance. So karma cannot remove ajnana (ignorance). To remove ignorance a special Vidya is necessary. To consider oneself as a doer (karta) of actions and as the experiencer (bhokta), it is all ignorance. No action done with the attitude of karta and bhokta will release you from sansara. The delusion of the mind can be dispelled only by Jnana. Neither ignorance is dispelled by karma nor does attachment and hatred diminish. So long as karma is done, the defects of doership, experiencership and such like limitations come up and these defects ensure that the sansara (cycle of birth and death) continues. So one should resort to Self-enquiry.

All actions emanate with the help of various factors like hands, feet etc. Mantras are used in

some rituals. The knowledge of Brahman does not require any of these aids. If you say why not use a combination of vidya and karma both, such a combination is not possible because VIDYA represents the knowledge, the reality behind objects while karma is a distraction of the senses. Hence one should continuously think of Atman (Self) and try to remove his attention from the objects before the senses. When one gets the ultimate knowledge which blows away the difference between Atman and the Paramatman (the Supreme Lord), Avidya disappears and even Maya does not remain. Then there will be no more re-birth. The Taittiriya, Aranyaka as also Brihadaranyaka Upanishad clearly aver that to have knowledge of our immortal nature we should abandon all activities. It cannot even be said that karams like yaga, yagna etc. and Jnana are both equal. The result of yaga and yagna is different from that of Brahmajnana. A yaga or a yagna requires a number of materials like fuel, ghee etc. and its result is also manifold (nectar, divine nymphs etc.), while Brahmajnana requires no such aids and has only the revelation of Brahman as its only result. Leaving off all activities one should approach the Guru with faith, and he will instruct on the Mahavakya of 'That Thou Art' and one's

mind becomes very pure by the grace of the Guru[62]. Thus having learnt the knowledge of identification of the Atman with Paramatman one becomes very happy.

The Mahavakyas cannot be understood by applying the dictionary meaning of those words. In the Mahavakya "THAT THOU ART", 'Thou' represents the Jiva subject to limitations and 'That' refers to the Paramatma (the Supreme Soul) which is not perceivable through senses. Both these, apparently cannot be identical. This can be understood only by a special process of deduction called Jahad-ajahal-lakshana (or Bhāga Tyāga Lakshana). The method of understanding the meaning of total sentence (not word by word) is called Lakshana. Here the external limiting adjuncts (upadhi) say, the limitation of knowledge of the Jiva and the all-knowing (Sarvajna) capacity of Paramatma are both to be abandoned and only the core compared.

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62. श्रद्धान्वितस्तत्त्वमसीति वाक्यतो गुरोः प्रसादादपि शुद्धमानसः।
विज्ञाय चैकात्म्यमथात्मजीवयोः सुखी भवेन्मेरुरिवाप्रकम्पनः॥
(VII-5-24)

Atman is not[63] subject to such changes like birth, death, growth, decay etc. This is beloved of all, self-revealed, all-pervasive, not excelled by anything else and non-dual. How can a world of sorrows appear in this Paramatma who is all bliss? It is all due to not understanding things. It is due to a delusion where the Reality is not understood just like seeing a serpent in darkness while it was only a rope. When one thing appears as another (different) thing due to delusion, it is called Adhyasa (Super-imposition).

In the intellect, the distinct presence of desire, attachment, joy and sorrow is the cause of sansar. Due to primal ignorance, a reflection falls in the intellect and this reflected light of Consciousness is called Jiva (individual soul). The Self is only a witness of the modifications of the mind and it is distinctly separate from these modifications. When my mind feels it is happy, Atman is not happy. The Self is unconditioned and it is beyond the intellect.

The body is a limiting adjunct (upadhi) for Atman. In other words the body's characteristics

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63. कदाचिदात्मा न मृतो न जायते न क्षीयते नापि विवर्धतेऽनवः।
निरस्तसर्वातिशयः सुखात्मकः स्वयंप्रभः सर्वगतोऽयमद्वयः॥

(VII-5-35)

are reflected in the Atman. The body is made up of a mixture of the basic five elements. Atman is one and it cannot be the body, a mixture of five elements. The body is made of perishable karmas and it is not real but it is as if created by a magic. Inside this is the subtle body made of mind, intellect, ten senses (cognitive and active) and the five pranas (vital breath). Where is ignorance then? The fact that we do not know that unique Brahman in reality is Ajnana. This ignorance has no beginning and it cannot be defined. A characteristic which is not inherent as its nature in an object but comes from another external object and adheres the first object is an upadhi. If a white crystal looks reddish because of the red flower kept behind the crystal, the reddishness is an upadhi of the crystal. So the mind, intellect, eyes, ear etc. are all upadhis of the Self (Atman). The Atman is free from all attributes. There are three modifications in the intellect namely waking state, dreaming state and sleep state. The one who is beyond them as a witness is only Siva. The intellect goes on changing due to association with the body, senses, prana (vital breath) etc. It has sometimes modifications of Tamoguna, sometimes of Rajas and sometimes of

Sattwa. Tamoguna Vritti represents ignorance and so long as it lasts, the sansara will also be there. By the process of negating[64] ("NOT THIS, NOT THIS") the possibility of all the objects being the Atman, one is able to taste the nectar of pure solid consciousness. Thus one should leave the thoughts of the world which are seen and drink the essence of the Bliss of the Self.

One should attain the proper[65] knowledge through the Guru and the words of the Vedas (Scriptures) and understand that the Self is already in us and it is bereft of all upadhis. All the rest, the world which is visible should be left off. There is no need to 'leave it'. Avoid thinking of the world and let all your attention be concentrated on the Self. One should think of the Self as in the form of a light, non-dual, Pure, Pure Consciousness, Perfect, as in the form of Bliss, actionless, as ever

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64. नेतिप्रमाणेन निराकृताखिलो हृदा समास्वादितचिद्घनामृतः।
त्यजेदशेषं जगदात्तसद्रसं पीत्वा यथाम्भः प्रजहाति तत्फलम्॥
(VII-5-34)

65. गुरोः सकाशादपि वेदवाक्यतः सञ्जातविद्यानुभवो निरीक्ष्य तम्।
स्वात्मानमात्मस्थमुपाधिवर्जितं त्यजेदशेषं जडमात्मगोचरम्॥
VII-5-42)

liberated, of inconceivable Power, a knowledge non-parcil and Infinite.[66] Thus one should continue to enquire into the nature of Atman (Self) with an unswerving mind. This is not a repetition of the attributes like a Japa but one should remain as the Self.

The heart and the thoughts then become absolutely pure and then Avidya dies along with its effects like a disease by means of a medicine.

One should remain seated in a solitary place with all his senses withdrawn, with pure thoughts, and think only of that one thing viz., the Atman. Your attention should be on that pure Consciousness and depending on no other aids, remain in your own nature as Atman. The method of going into Samadhi is – first think of 'OM' (Pranava). Whatever creation is seen it is all merged in OM. The Supreme Brhaman along with the entire universe is indicated by OM. This world appears due to ignorance and not due to knowledge.

OM consists of three syllables A, U and M (pronounced in Sanskrit as 'A' like 'U' in the word

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66. एवं सदात्मानमखण्डितात्मना विचारमाणस्य विशुद्धभावना।
हन्यादविद्यामचिरेण कारकै रसायनं यद्वदुपासितं रुजः॥ (VII-5-45)

'CUT', 'U' as in the word 'PUT' and 'M' as 'MA'.) Dissolve the entire Gross world (VISWA) in 'A' (this is an imagination so that only 'A' remains, world having disappeared into it). Similarly dissolve the subtle body (which manifests as TAIJASA in the dream) in 'U' and the causal body (PRAJNA) in 'M'. Now again dissolve 'A' in 'U' and 'U' in 'M' i.e. VISWA (the one presiding over the gross body in the waking state) in the TAIJASA (one presiding over the subtle body in the dream state) and dissolve the TAIJASA in PRĀJNA (one presiding over the causal body in sleep). Finally dissolve 'M' also in your original nature as Atman – the Pure Consciousness. This process is like breaking a pot and imagining that now only the clay remains as the pot has been dissolved into the clay (in imagination). So now think no more of the pot as only the clay remains. In the same way, as the entire world has all been dissolved in the Supreme Brhaman, leave off the idea that the world is different from the Brhaman and so think of the Brahman only. It is the Brhaman who manifested as the world just as the rope appeared as a serpent. When we found the truth, the serpent disappeared into the rope (in a figurative way) and the mind thinks of the rope only. Remain merged in Brhaman and forget the world.

This is the stage where[67] one sees himself as Brahman, as pure Consciousness, liberated from all upadhis (conditioning through external adjuncts). At this stage, there is nothing[68] outside nor inside. The plenary Brhaman, which is Consciousness and Bliss alone remains.

Thus one should remain[69] with his mind thinking of himself as Pure Brahman, merged in that Bliss, having forgotten everything else, completely liberated and like an ocean of still waters. If one remains[70] in this state of meditation night and day being liberated from all bondage, quietly exhausting his prarabdha (past karmas) and bereft of ego, one finally dissolves into one's Self (Rama). Remember at all times, in the beginning,

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67. मकारमप्यात्मनि चिद्घने परे विलापयेत्प्राज्ञमपीह कारणम्।
सोऽहं परं ब्रह्म सदा विमुक्तिमद्विज्ञानदृङ् मुक्त उपाधितोऽमलः॥
(VII-5-51)

68. पूर्णश्चिदानन्दमयोऽवतिष्ठते न वेदबाह्यं न च किञ्चिदान्तरम्॥
(VII-5-47)

69. एवं सदा जातपरात्मभावनः स्वानन्दतुष्टः परिविस्मृताखिलः।
आस्ते स नित्यात्मसुखप्रकाशकः साक्षाद्विमुक्तोऽचलवारिसिन्धुवत्॥
(VII-5-52)

70. ध्यात्वैवमात्मानमहर्निशं मुनिस्तिष्ठेत्सदा मुक्तसमस्तबन्धनः।
प्रारब्धमश्नन्नभिमानवर्जितो मय्येव साक्षात्प्रविलीयते नरः॥
(VII-5-54)

in the middle as well as at the end, that this Sansara is the source of all sorrows, miseries and fears, leave off all dos and donts and take refuge in the Self of all the beings.

Look at the entire creation as not separate from you. Just as water is one with the ocean and milk poured into another milk is one, the entire creation is Atman. Both as per Scriptures, logic and experience, this multiple creation has no existence of its own and has, therefore, to be discarded.

So long as we are unable to look at the entire world as the form of the Supreme Lord (Rama Himself) one should worship Him with love, devotion and faith. The Lord becomes visible to him in his heart permanently.[71]

Thus ends Rama Gita. Rama continues – "Oh Lakshmana, this is briefly the summary of the scriptural teachings on Vedanta and it is normally kept secret (not open to all who are unfit to receive them). The one who contemplates on this will be freed from all sins. It does not matter at all whether

71. यावन्न पश्येदखिलं मदात्मकं तावन्मदाराधनतत्परो भवेत्।
श्रद्धालुरत्यूर्जितभक्तिलक्षणो यस्तस्य दृश्योऽहमहर्निशं हृदि॥
(VII-5-58)

one worships me as Nirguna (beyond all gunas and attributeless) or Saguna (with all the attributes), so long as he keeps his mind in the Supreme Lord. The entire creation becomes blessed by the dust of the feet of such a devotee." As this Rama Gita has been sung by me (Rama), whosoever recites it with devotion to his Guru, is endowed with my own nature (Swaroopa).

Lord Siva continued the story. At the Ashram of Valmiki, Sita gave birth to twin sons - named Lava and Kusa. When they grew up they studied scriptures and all other subjects too. Valmiki taught them to sing the entire story of Rama and Sita (Ramayanam), which he himself had composed and had been originally narrated by Lord Siva to Parvati. In the meantime Rama continued to perform an Asvamedha sacrifice. As in the case of all the sacrifices, the presence of one's wife is essential, Rama kept a golden statue of Sita for the purpose. Many great sages and people of all castes came to attend the sacrifice. Sage Valmiki also went to the place of sacrifice along with Lava and Kusa.

One day, finding Valmiki alone in the camping place, Kusa approached him and requested to know how this firm bondage in sansara takes place

and how to get rid of it. Valmiki began to instruct him:–

Even though the Self is of the nature of Consciousness and is formless, it abides in our bodies. Ego (or I) is the minister to the Self and has been imagined by the Self. It remains in the Self by super-imposing its own attachments to home and body on the latter. A person identifies his Self with the ego and considers himself as the doer of all actions. No doubt he is the pure Consciousness but the Vasanas (past latent tendencies) endow him with the doership and experiencership (Karta and Bhokta bhava). So the Atman imagines Himself as owning a body and thus binds himself. He forgets his nature as the Supreme Lord and by his Sankalpa (an imaginary resolution) acquires sons, wife, house, etc. He is caught in the handcuffs of his own imagination voluntarily. All the bondage is one's own imagination. Thus he himself makes the Sankalpa and later on regrets it and feels unhappy.

The ego has a threefold body. One is made up of Tamoguna and it is the worst. His resolutions and desires are of Tamoguna, which makes him to

be born as insects, worms. The second body is of Rajoguna which entangles a person in worldly activities due to worldly sankalpas. By sankalpas of Sattwa nature, one gets interested in virtuous acts, strives for moksha and attains happiness. Sankalpa means the thought or resolution that "This is good, I like it and so I shall do this action" or "This is not to my liking and I shall not do it." One should leave all the three types of Sankalpas. One should not consider as 'mine' (i.e., belonging to him) all the three states – waking based on Sattwaguna, dream state based on Rajoguna and sleep based on Tamoguna. Leave off your attention to the world and bring your mind under control.

Even if we do[72] austerities for thousands of years, either on earth or in heaven, we cannot get peace so long as we do sankalpas that 'it should be like this' or 'it should not be like this'. It is these sankalpas which result in unhappiness. Make special effort not to make sankalpas like 'I shall be happy if I get this thing' and 'I dislike this and I do not want it' etc., The entire creation is bound

72. यदि वर्षसहस्राणि तपश्चरसि दारुणम्॥ (VII-6-51)
नान्यः काश्चिदुपायोऽस्ति सङ्कल्पोपशमादृते॥ (VII-6-52)

to sankalpas. Accept things as they come[73] and do not make sankalpas. Then Jiva attains the status of the Brhaman.

On hearing these instructions, Kusa was enlightened and his delusion was dispelled. Outwardly he continued with his normal routine duties. Valmiki asked the two boys to sing in the presence of Rama, in case the latter exhibited any interest but ordered them not to accept any royal present, if any, given. Lava and Kusa went on singing beautifully Rama's story in the streets and Ramachandra got them to sing in his own presence. He was completely fascinated by their melodious songs of his own exploits. The people present were all astonished to find that all the features of these boys were identical to those of Rama himself. When at Rama's behest Bharata gave them ten thousand gold coins they courteously refused it on the ground that they were forest dwellers who had little use for the money.

When Rama came to know that the twins were the children of Sita, he ordered Satrughna to bid Valmiki Rishi to come along with Sita and to bid

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73. निःसङ्कल्पो यथाप्राप्तव्यवहारपरो भव।
क्षये सङ्कल्पजालस्य जीवो ब्रह्मत्वमाप्नुयात्॥ (VII-6-55)

Hanuman, Angada, Vibhishana and Sushena (monkey doctor) to come to his court. "Before all my courtiers let Sita convince all of us that she is pure and free from any defect". All the subjects in Ayodhya also gathered the next day in Rama's court to witness this great event.

Sage Valmiki entered the court with Sita following him and with her both hands folded together in respect. Sage Valmiki came forward and declared:-

"Oh Rama, this Sita is of impeccable conduct and one who has never swerved from the path of dharma (righteousness). She is sinless and you did wrong in abandoning her in the forest being afraid of the defaming accusations from the gossiping world. These twin children have been born to you. This is the gospel truth. I have never in my life told any untruth, to my knowledge. May all the austerities and penance done by me become infructuous in case Sita can be proved to be of wrong conduct."

Rama acknowledged "I am firmly convinced by your words and I had known it earlier too. It was due to fear of defamation by the people that I abandoned her. I may kindly be pardoned for my mistake." Then Lord Brahma arrived at the scene

along with numerous gods. Sita turned her face towards the North and with her eyes on the ground and hands folded in reverence said:-

"I have never thought of anybody except Rama. If this is a fact, may Mother Earth give me a place inside her." Immediately the earth broke up and a divine throne borne by serpents came up. The Mother Earth herself caught hold of Sita in her hands with love, seated her on the throne and took her to the nether world (Patala). All the people assembled became stunned and remained unconscious for some time. Rama began to grieve openly at this bereavement (as if he had not known all this well in advance). He went to Ayodhya from the place where the sacrifice was performed only with his sons and began to attend to his duties like a zombie. He began to spend more time in solitude.

One day his mother Kausalya came to Rama and requested him to instruct her in that knowledge which would release her from the bondage of sansara (Phenomenal world). Rama began to instruct her:-

"There are three principal paths leading to Moksha - viz., the path of action (Karma Yoga),

the path of knowledge (Jnana Yoga) and the path of love with devotion (Bhakti Yoga).

In Bhakti Yoga, there are three types of devotees according to predominance of the gunas (basic characteristics or mode). The one who worships the Lord with differentiated outlook (considering each being as different from another) or with a view to cause violence or trouble or out of hypocrisy, just to show off is a Tamasic devotee (of Tamoguna). The one who is devoted to the Lord seeking riches, fame, enjoyment and such like fruits, and worships him in an idol taking it as different from all beings is a Rajasic devotee (full of Rajoguna). The one who dedicates all his actions to the Lord or who performs actions as a duty to be done is a Sattvic devotee (of Sattvaguna).

There is another type of Bhakti which transcends all gunas where there is no categorisation as Sattvik, Rajasic etc.[74] In this Bhakti, one's mind should be increasingly and continuously directed towards the Lord taking refuge in the lovable qualities of the Lord or by thinking of them

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74. मद्गुणाश्रयणादेव मय्यनन्तगुणालये।
अविच्छिन्ना मनोवृत्तिर्यथा गङ्गाम्बुनोऽम्बुधौ॥ (VII-7-64)

ceaselessly like the flow of the Ganges towards the ocean, and that too without any motive. This bhakti entitles them to any of the four types of Mukti namely – co-existence in His loka, viz., Vaikuntha (Sālokya), proximity of the Lord (Sāmeepya), having all the glorious powers of the Lord (Sārshti) or to be absorbed in the Lord (Sāyujya). But the bhakta refuses to choose any of these muktis and seeks to continue serving the Lord.[75] This is a path of devotion where one[75] transcends all the three gunas and becomes identified with the Lord.

The Karma yoga is done[76] by observing in practice the duties prescribed for his caste, station in life etc. Unmotivated by any desires and ensuring scrupulously that no harm or violence towards any being is involved, one should do prayers and pooja, remember God constantly and prostrate before Him. One should look at all the beings as forms of God Himself, cultivate Satsanga, be truthful, honour saints, be compassionate towards the distressed and be friendly with all equals.

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75. स एवात्यन्तिको योगो भक्तिमार्गस्य भामिनि।
मद्भावं प्राप्नुयात्तेन अतिक्रम्य गुणत्रयम्॥ (VII-7-67)

76. महता कामहीनेन स्वधर्माचरणेन च।
कर्मयोगेन शस्तेन वर्जितेन विहिंसनात्॥ (VII-7-68)

One should observe the dos and donts of life as defined in yama, niyama etc., attend discourses[77] on Vedanta and repeatedly chant the Lord's names. One should be straightforward and abandon the ego. Thus following the dharmas prescribed for reaching the Lord and having his mind cleansed of all impurities, he reaches me just by hearing about my qualities.

The salient points of Jnana yoga are: – As the Lord is installed in all the beings as their Self, the ignorant worldly people do not understand this but do only external pooja. God is never pleased with the one who disrespects other beings but worships an idol even though he may make a lot of offerings to the idol. One should continue[78] worshipping the Lord in an idol till such time as he does not recognize the Lord who is in all the beings and his own Self, as a result of his God-oriented actions. One should understand that there is only one God who abides in all the beings. One should worship

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77. वेदान्तवाक्यश्रवणान्मम नामानुकीर्तनात्।
सत्सङ्गेनार्जवेणैव ह्यहमः परिवर्जनात्॥ (VII-7-71)

78. तावन्मामर्चयेद्देवं प्रतिमादौ स्वकर्मभिः।
यावत्सर्वेषु भूतेषु स्थितं चात्मनि न स्मरेत्॥ (VII-7-76)

that God through this knowledge, friendship and with respect without a mind which differentiates between one being and another.

A wise man[79] should prostrate to all the beings mentally at all times after understanding that it is the Pure Consciousness which is established as Jiva in all the beings. One should never look at Jiva and Isvara as separate and distinct.

"Thus both the Bhakti yoga and Jnana yoga have been explained by me. By taking hold of either of them one can get the highest good. Oh mother, you may always constantly think of me as the Lord seated in the hearts of all or as your own son and thus you will attain Peace." Kausalya followed Rama's advice to the letter and attained Moksha. Kaikeyi and Sumitra also attained the Lord after death.

After the passing of a long time, the God of death came to have a private audience with Rama, in the guise of a sage. He enjoined on Rama that they should talk to each other in the most secret

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79. चेतसैवानिशं सर्वभूतानि प्रणमेत्सुधीः।
ज्ञात्वा मां चेतनं शुद्धं जीवरूपेण संस्थितम्॥ (VII-7-79)

manner so that nobody should hear it, and nobody should be told about their conversation. Anybody who happens to see them talking or hear them should be killed. Rama gave strict injunctions to Lakshmana to keep a vigilant watch outside personally, not to allow anybody inside and if any body were to come in, he should be killed. The God of death passed on to Rama a message from Brahma that "As your work has been accomplished, my Lord, if you feel like it, you may now come to the plane of gods." Rama readily agreed to that request.

In the meantime, Sage Durvasa, famous for his outbursts of anger, came to Lakshmana and insisted on seeing Rama instantly that very minute. He refused to disclose his purpose to Lakshmana and was not prepared to wait for a few minutes. He threatened to destroy Rama, his subjects, all his relatives and the entire kingdom by reducing them to ashes if he was not given immediate admittance. Lakshmana thought that it was better to offer himself to death rather than subject Rama and the people to total destruction. He went inside in spite of the ban imposed and informed Rama of Durvasa's arrival. Rama dismissed the God of death and welcomed sage Durvasa. As Durvasa's

vow of fasting for one thousand years was completed that very day, he wanted to be served meals (Bhiksha) in Rama's residence. Rama complied with his request and the sage returned to his Ashram happily.

Rama then remembered his promise to the God of death to kill any third member who intruded when they were talking privately. Lakshmana, therefore, deserved to be put to death. Rama was so full of sorrow at this thought that he was unable to talk. He explained the situation to all his courtiers and consulted them. Lakshmana requested Rama to kill him straightaway and not to worry about it. All the people including Vasishtha advised him that dharma had to be upheld at all times even if it involved the sacrifice of the life of near and dear ones. Rama then asked Lakshmana to go away as abandoning a good person as also killing him were both considered as equal. Lakshmana prostrated before Rama and went away to the banks of the river Sarayu. Lakshmana sat down, closed the nine orifices in his body and drew up the Prana (vital breath) from the entire body to his head through yoga. His mind was concentrated on Vasudeva, the Supreme Brahman and he held up his breath. Indra himself came and

took Lakshmana to the Heavens and merged him with his original form as Adi Sesha.

Rama decided to leave the Earth for good the same day. Bharata, Satrughna, and Sugriva entreated Rama to take them also along with him. All the citizens of Ayodhya along with their entire families desired to go along with Rama wherever he decided to go – to the heaven or elsewhere. All the monkeys, bears, sages and saints also expressed their resolve to accompany Rama to the other world. Rama enjoined on Vibhishana to continue his rule in Lanka till the end of that kalpa. After expressing his undying gratitude to Hanuman for all the help rendered by him, Rama asked Hanuman and Jambavan to continue on the Earth. Early morning after finishing the religious rites incumbent on a dying person, Rama started from the city, preceded by his Guru, Vasishtha.

Rama took up his resplendent divine form. Lakshmi and Bhoomi Devi (Mother Earth) joined him. All the weapons including his bow and arrow, all the Vedas, Sages, Gayathri the mother of Vedas, Pranava (OMKARA) all took up forms and followed the Lord. None of the citizens, monkeys, ministers,

Bharata, Sugriva etc. was either afflicted with grief or sorrow or had the least attachment to any of the objects of the world. All the persons who followed Rama were bubbling with happiness and vairagya (dispassion). It was a unique sight. Lord Brahma also arrived at the scene. Lord Rama went to Sarayu walking on bare foot and sipped the holy water of the river (achamana) for purification. On request from Brhama, he assumed his four-armed form bearing chakra (discus) etc. Lord Adisesha came and spread himself as a bed for Rama to sit. Bharata and Satrughna took up their original forms as the chakra and the conch (sankha). All the gods sang songs of praise. Rama told Brahma "Let all those who have followed me, let them be birds or animals even, be allowed to come to my loka (plane of existence) and live with equal status and treatment, after I leave." Lord Brahma said: – "Oh Rama, may all those who[80] take your holy name even in ignorance reach the higher planes (lokas) of existence at the time of death – the same planes attainable by yogis through their sadhana of Yoga." All the men submerged themselves in the waters of

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८०. ये चापि ते राम पवित्रनाम गृणन्ति मर्त्या लयकाल एव।
अज्ञानतो वापि भजन्तु लोकांस्तानेव योगैरपि चाधिगम्यान्॥
(VII-9-63)

Sarayu and left their bodies. Aerial vehicles came and took them all to higher planes.

Thus Lord Siva concluded his narration of Ramayana to Parvati. Those who read or hear this Ramayana which is fascinating and is praised by all gods too get purified and reach the feet of Lord Vishnu.

UTTARA KĀNDA COMPLETED

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APPENDIX

Certain Practical Hints for SPIRITUAL SADHANA

1. The main aim in our life is to get permanent happiness and to avoid sorrows and miseries at any cost. Where happiness is, sorrows cannot be there. We have given the name GOD to the sole proprietor of the Super Bazar of permanent happiness. God does not sell his goods but gives them free to those who love Him. So befriend and love God whole-heartedly so that he will open for you the door of happiness. So GOD-REALISATION is the DO-ALL and END-ALL of one's life. Nobody, even an Emperor or the President of a country has ever got happiness out of worldly prosperity or riches. Why don't you try this method, as an experiment at least?

2. God is described in scriptures as SAT (Existence), CHIT (Awareness) and ANANDA (Happiness). He is the source of all happiness. This happiness is permanent (SAT), as it exists at all times. One becomes aware (Chit) of the happiness and will be able to enjoy it. What is

the use of having a thing, which will give you happiness, but like a wall (an insentient object) you will not be conscious of it.

3. The main Sadhana to realise God is to push the world away from you so that it will not come to you in any form say – money, entertainment, house, wife, children, name and fame etc. All worldly prosperity or calamities come absolutely by Lord's will and you can't do anything either to prevent a calamity or to earn prosperity not willed by the Lord, try as you might. Accept what comes and do not desire for anything. Then there will be no need to involve yourself in any action motivated by desires.

4. Spend your entire time in meditation and prayers and have less and less to do with the world, except for working for the minimum maintenance of your body (including that of running the family). Avoid gossiping with friends even on spiritual subjects. Avoid visiting friends in their houses or in restaurants or clubs etc.

5. Do not become members or office-bearers of institutions of high prestige, as they become

instruments of ego and obstruct your spiritual progress in many ways.

6. Especially avoid any frequent or closer relationship or movement with members of opposite sex even if they are old or highly spiritual (in your eye).

7. A person with high spiritual ambition should not start any action or plan any enterprise worldly or social or spiritual (e.g., building temples, building or running a hospital for the poor or blind, running a spiritual or religious school) or association to promote dharma and spiritual culture. Our first and only duty is to realise God or to know who we are. Karma Yoga is excellent for those who can neither pray nor meditate nor do Japa nor do Self-inquiry (Atma Vichara).

8. Even to be a trustee or advisor to charitable, religious or social trusts is an obstacle to spiritual sadhana. It should be avoided. DO NOT participate in their functions in any capacity whatsoever.

9. Do not preach or give spiritual advice or training to anybody unless he/she asks for it. Preaching and advising on spiritual matters in public or to family members when the preacher himself is half-baked in his knowledge and equipped with some bookish knowledge and with no practical experience can be harmful to the other person. Nobody should preach in public without God's own command. Till all our vasanas are removed, whatever inner voice which a person imagines to be God's own command is all generated from vasanas and not from God at all.

10. When anyone starts to gossip on worldly or Godly matters, even on Saints comparing their relative merits or defects, either you get out of the company or begin to chant OM, HARI OM or SRIRAM or such names of the Lord loudly. This will disconcert the other party.

11. Looking at others with a critical eye and dwelling in narrating or hearing scandals or defects about other people's (saints or otherwise) conduct will result in corrupting our own mind and in our spiritual downfall.

12. Whenever you feel tired of meditation or Japa, try to sing loudly with gusto the names of the Lord for some time and this will revive you.

13. Whenever you are forced to talk to others in person or through phone on worldly or spiritual matters, make a habit of taking Lord's name (say HARI OM, MAHADEVA, NARAYANA, SRIRAM etc.,) once or twice just in the middle of the conversation suddenly. This will check the tendency of the Sadhaka to take deeper interest or getting involved in less spiritual matters and will also make us remember God from time to time.

14. While in meditation, whenever any alien thought intrudes, repeat mentally three times "CUT, CUT, CUT". The intruding thought will disappear and the mind will revert to the original object of meditation. You should be very alert to detect the intruder's presence and nip it in the bud immediately. With a lot of practice the mind will settle down and will refuse to be lured into the extraneous thoughts.

15. God is our own mother. No earthly mother has ever confided in fully or revealed to any child even in later periods of life as to how alert she

used to remain, anticipate every need of her child and rush to the succour of the child whenever there was any threat (say from birds, monkeys, ants, sudden alarming noises from outside causing fear to the child etc.). Similarly if you become helpless like a child leaving your own welfare solely in the hands of the Lord and confine yourself to think and meditate on God, the latter will look after you and rush to your aid whether there is a crisis in your physical life or in your spiritual sadhana, in his own time as He is more concerned with you than you can ever imagine. This has been the experience of several sadhus including the author.

16. Refrain from attending or participating in any social functions like marriages, music concerts, dance performances, dramas and even funerals as unknowingly you will get involved and be exposed to tempting assaults by the objects of the world from which one should always keep a distance.

17. Some devotees of both sexes sometime join together once a week or once a month in the name of God singing kirtans and dancing

together in front of or around a lighted lamp, for eg., in 'Radha Kalyanam' in the south and Garbha dances in Gujarat during Navaratri. Such mixed gatherings of both sexes dancing around (sometimes holding hands) is nothing but playing with fire and inviting trouble as it may arouse the baser instincts and vasanas in some of them. If at all such celebrations are done, they may be done separately by groups of men and of women. As each devotee is at a different level of spiritual growth, at higher stages collective Sadhanas should be avoided and each one should strive individually.

18. As an exception to the above, at earlier stages, one may organise collective reading classes where once a week or daily or on alternate days one may read out loudly Ramayana, Bhagavatam or Scriptures like Bhagavd Gita, Upanishads etc., with simple meaning or commentary and others hear. In such gatherings, beyond reading them, any public discussions and argument should be avoided. Any doubt should be got clarified later from religious scholars, saints etc., individually.

19. Even while striving to do spiritual sadhana, do not try to change your environment to one more conducive in your opinion and also to make your spiritual life more and more comfortable. Meditating inside an air conditioned room, sitting amidst cushions, with a bottle of mineral water or fruit juice by the side with the background music of a Bhajan in a sweet feminine voice from a tape recorder can never get you God even in a million years of life by such sadhana. It does not also mean that you should go to a jungle and sit on a seat of sharp-pointed nails or stand on one foot and meditate. Wherever you are and in whatever environment, you should do your sadhana by hitching on your mind unswervingly to the Lord who is also our Self. Accept all situations and concentrate your mind on God at all times. At one stage of advanced Sadhana all environment, however antagonistic, will all change in your favour.

20. Seeking the company of holy men and saints, constant remembrance of God or attention to the Self (Atman), prayers, meditation and reading of the experiences and biographies of

saints (while avoiding all worldly involvement and contacts) are the main keys for Self-realisation or God-realization.

21. Never swerve from the path of right conduct and do not attach any value to world's opinion. Never try to impress other people or try to conform to others' standard of how a spiritual man should be. Scriptures and the Guru are sufficient guides for you.

Most important of all sadhanas is "Remember God or Self at all times" – (Satata Smaranam).

|| Hari om ||

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His Holiness Sri Shantananda Puri Maharaj of Vasishtha Guha (Himalayas), born in 1928, is a disciple of Parama Poojya Sri Swami Purushottamananda Puri Maharaj of Vasishtha Guha, Himalayas.

Swamiji is a scholar par excellence in Vedic Scriptures as well as in Puranic texts. His deep knowledge and lucid exposition of Srimad Bhagavatam, Bhagavad Gita and Ashtavakra Gita have made him a popular guide to spiritual aspirants. His simplicity, transparent deep faith in the Divine force and absolute surrender to the Supreme have made him an ideal combination of Jnana, Bhakti and Vairagya.

Swamiji's prodigious learning and deep devotion to the tenets of Indian philosophy and culture have reflected themselves in all his works, which are practical guides for inner personal experience and to raise oneself to a higher level of being. His emphasis has always been on 'Practise, practise, practise'.

In this book, Swamiji has laid emphasis on the various Vedantic Sadhanas explained directly or indirectly in the original text.

Apart from Adhyatma Ramayanam and certain regional versions like Kamba Ramayanam, the most popular ones in India are Valmiki Ramayanam and Ramcharitmanas (Ramayan composed in Hindi by Tulsidas), which lay emphasis on dharma (moral laws) and bhakti (devotion) respectively.

Adhyatma Ramayanam is replete with the highest philosophical truth and supreme knowledge (jnana). As all the Scriptures aver that jnana is the only path to moksha, this present text can be considered as the quintessence of all such knowledge. While the Upanishads use a mystic language, this text has made use of a very simple language for expounding the highest truths with easily comprehensible analogies.

The slight variations in the popular story of Rama introduced in this text add to its flavour.